



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

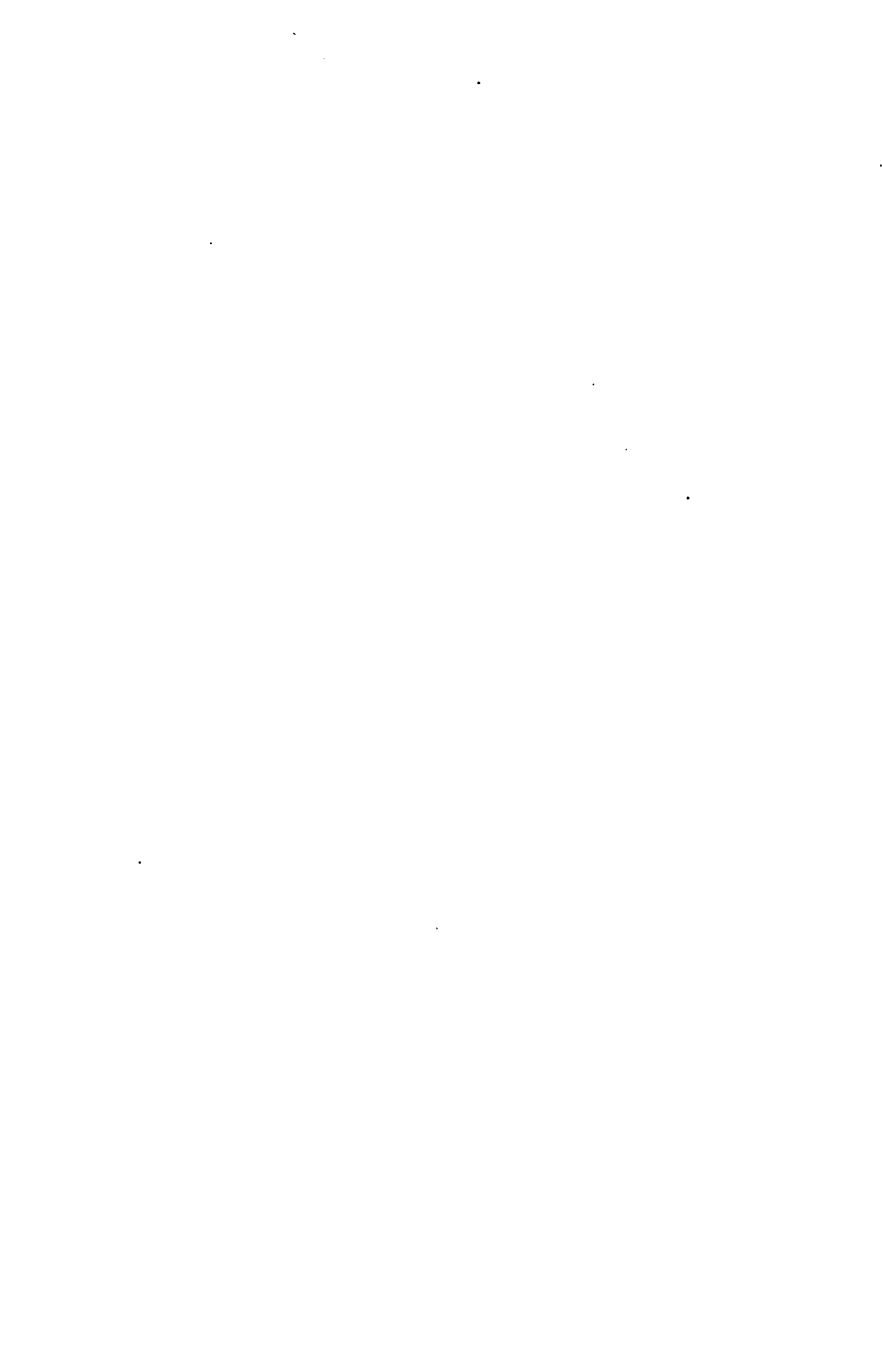
Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>







BESIDE STILL WATERS



BESIDE STILL WATERS

A NOVEL

BY

WILLIAM MACKAY

AUTHOR OF 'THE POPULAR IDOL,' 'PRO PATRIA,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III

London

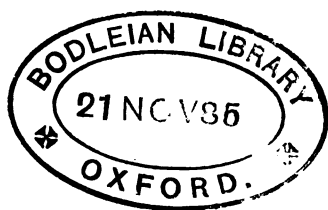
REMINGTON & CO., PUBLISHERS

HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN W.C.

1885

All Rights Reserved

256. e. 1598



CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

A BRUISED REED	1
-----------------------	---

CHAPTER II

A BEWILDERED HOPPY	11
---------------------------	----

CHAPTER III

ONCE AGAIN	27
-------------------	----

CHAPTER IV

GOOD-NATURED FRIENDS	46
-----------------------------	----

CHAPTER V

AND MAKE TWO LOVERS HAPPY	57
----------------------------------	----

CHAPTER VI

A CELEBRITY AT HOME	73
-------------------------------	----

CHAPTER VII

IN MINE INN	86
-----------------------	----

CHAPTER VIII

OUR FUTURE MEMBER.	100
----------------------------	-----

CHAPTER IX

A FAIR CONSPIRATOR	116
------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER X

I HAVE COME HOME	126
----------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XI

THE PALATIAL: LATE EASTON'S	142
---------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XII

A HEAP OF DUST	160
--------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XIII

It	175
--------------	-----

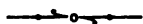
CHAPTER XIV

THE HOUSE OF MOURNING	185
---------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XV

AND ALL TOLD	205
------------------------	-----

BESIDE STILL WATERS



CHAPTER I

A BRUISED REED

FROM the congenial shelter of the public-house, nearly opposite, James Gates, Esq., turf prophet and man about town, watched Ruth alight from the rickety four-wheeler. His keen and delicate sense of humour was wonderfully tickled when Hoppy descended, displaying to the greatest advantage his gala costume.

Mr Molt was quite unconscious of the

interest which he was exciting in the breast of Mr Gates. He was confused by the roll of the traffic, the size and regularity of the houses, the variety of the faces and dresses. In Wapshot he knew every face he encountered. Here, he did not recognise one.

Moreover, we know that Mr Molt being a fisherman, was a bit of a philosopher. It will, therefore, be readily inferred that his brain was severely exercised by the transactions in which he was now taking an active part. Hoppy's mind was more than ever puzzled by the attempt to make the ways of the world harmonise with the doctrines of the Book which Ruth had taught him to read. 'Honour thy father.' The Book said that with a distinctness and directness quite undeniable. No amount of Revision could cause the disappearance of that mandate. But was Ruth honouring her father? Hoppy could scarcely go so far as to believe it. Indeed, he admitted that she was deceiving

and disobeying him. But Ruth, in his eyes, could do no wrong; so this heathen of the Thames Valley settled the matter to his own satisfaction, by supposing the Commandment in question to be a dead letter, and his young mistress to be perfectly justified in taking the somewhat extraordinary course she had adopted.

He had just come to this illogical and irreligious conclusion when a close brougham drew up behind his own cab, and a lady descended to the pavement, whose appearance immediately attracted his attention. He had never seen the lady before; and yet the face differed from all the others that had passed him. Its features seemed familiar to him. Here was more subject matter for reflection. Hoppy was born to be puzzled.

Meanwhile, Ruth entered the mansion in which Dick's chambers were situated. In a timid and scarcely audible voice she asked the hall porter to give her information as to their whereabouts. That admirable man

directed her to the 'fust floor.' She ascended the stone steps, and came to a door on which Dick's name was inscribed on a tiny brass plate.

The door was open. It was left so purposely, she argued, for was he not expecting her? He was ill, and to knock might disturb him. She would enter. With a palpitating heart, she still further opened the portal, and stood in a broad carpeted passage, at the further end of which was a *portière* partly drawn. That surely would be the entrance to his sitting-room. The passage that she traversed was dark.

She heard voices ; she heard Dick's voice. How her heart beat ! A woman's voice ! How her heart ceased to beat.

She drew the *portière* slightly. Ah ! cruel sight. There, in the middle of the room, stood a woman, with big bold eyes and painted face ; but, with all her disguise, Ruth recognised Polly Parsons. Dick stood before Polly. Ruth could not choose but gaze. The

words of the speakers forced themselves upon her ear. She heard but two sentences. The painted girl, stretching out her hands, upon which poor Ruth could see the diamonds sparkle, exclaimed with great animation—

‘I love you dearly. Indeed, indeed I do!’

And Dick—*her* Dick, the hero of her little life’s romance—did not repel the advances of the brazen wench. Indeed, he accepted them quite coolly, and as a matter of course. He only said—

‘Come, Polly, that’s ever so much better.’

Ruth’s heart was bruised within her. She turned and fled along the passage and down the steps. Her lover was not only faithless. He was a shameless profligate. The words she had heard burned themselves into her memory. For her, life’s dream was over for ever.

Vague, shapeless desires came into her mind. Some evanescent—some recurring. She would like to hide away, so that no one should hear of her shame and of her

disappointment. She would like to die now that life had suddenly turned to bitterness.

Every vestige of colour had left her cheeks. The light had died out of her eyes. She walked as one in a dream. How she got to the street she never knew. When she reached the pavement, it swayed beneath her, and the great tall houses rocked like waves. She staggered, and would have fallen to the ground, had she not been caught and supported by strong rough arms.

Mr James Gates, still surveying life through the window of the tavern, seemed greatly interested in the turn events had taken. When he saw Ruth's pale, frightened face, and watched her fall forward into Hoppy's arms, he chuckled to himself—just as the Fiend chuckles over a lost soul.

His chuckling ceased, and was followed by an exclamation of surprise, as he saw the fainting girl placed in the brougham that had drawn up behind Hoppy's cab. The lady followed the girl. The carriage drove

off—Hoppy following in the rattling four-wheeler.

‘That’s a rum start, Mr Benson,’ he observed to a gentleman who stood at his elbow. Benson, who was Dick’s valet, and a great personal friend of Gates, declared that he didn’t see anything particular in the incident.

‘Gurls are allus faintin’. Gurls are a nooseance,’ observed Mr Benson, who, perhaps, had been badly treated by the sex. Then the gentleman’s gentleman shook hands with his friend, and went back to close his master’s door, which he had left invitingly but inadvertently open.

Half-an-hour later, Gates, for whom the pot-house had an irresistible attraction, beheld, through his favourite pane of glass, young Hook and Baby Parsons leave the chambers opposite, talking to each other, and laughing in the greatest good humour. They were, no doubt, on their way to a rehearsal at the Oddity.

Somehow the incident had not terminated in exactly the way anticipated by Mr Gates. Plots in real life differ from those in novels. In real life you may contrive some of the situations, but you cannot always control the *dénouement*.

So James swore a gentlemanly oath or two, called, in a lordly manner, for 'a three-penny smoke,' and swaggered off to Piccadilly, where he gazed into the faces of the passing ladies, and puffed his clouds of vile tobacco smoke under their pretty noses, and generally behaved himself with such ease and elegance, that anyone who didn't know him might have taken him for a duke, or, at least, for the owner of all the mansions on one side of the road, and of all the green park on the other. 'Manners makes a man,' quoth William of Wickham.

When consciousness was returning to Ruth, she dreamed a sweet, soothing dream, that seemed to lessen the dull, deadly pain at

her heart. She was back at Wapshot. Opposite to her on the wall hung that oil-painting of a lady, of which her father never spoke, but which she had always understood to be that of her mother.

As the dream proceeded, the picture seemed to grow to life; the lips moved in speech. Then the picture, now arrived at full length, shed its frame, which vanished into air. The soft lips brushed her forehead with a kiss. And she dreamt that this kiss was the very same which she had received when she was a little child. Or perhaps it was that the memory of that kiss revived, and mingled—as things will do in dreams—with this.

The gentle pressure of the lips was so real, that Ruth opened her eyes. But though her eyes were opened, the vision of the lady still stood before her. And, as she gazed upon it, a wan, melancholy smile passed over her pallid face, like an escaped sunbeam across a gray October sky.

And, as the smile died away, she heaved a heart-broken sigh, closed her eyes again, and slept.

When she awoke, she stared round her. She was lying on a low couch in a strange boudoir. She could see that it was elegantly furnished. There was a strong smell of vinegar in the room. She had fainted and come-to again. She was sorry for that. She had hoped that she was dead.

Then the vision came again—the vision of the lady from the picture. But it was no vision. It was the original of the picture gazing at Ruth, with loving, nervous glance.

The light came back to Ruth's eyes. A faint colour appeared in her cheeks. She started from her couch.

‘Ruth, Ruth! do you know me?’ cried the elder lady, in anxious tones.

‘Mother, mother!’

And, in a moment, her mother's arms were round her, and she was crying her heart out on her mother's breast.

CHAPTER II

A BEWILDERED HOPPY

WHEN Hoppy arrived at the house of Mrs Fleming—and it was with considerable difficulty that his driver had kept the brougham in sight—he was conveyed to the kitchen and regaled with beef and beer. He was no doubt regarded by the menials at the basement as an altogether odious and vulgar old man. Hoppy was, however, quite unconscious of their opinion. His mind was grappling with weightier matters. He was in a state of greater bewilderment than ever.

So he worked his way steadily through the beef and beer deeply meditating.

More than two hours had elapsed when Hoppy was summoned to ascend to the upper regions. He followed the servant feeling like one in a dream. As he entered the room, Ruth, who lay pale and prostrate on a couch, extended her hand. He took it tenderly and respectfully and felt awake again.

‘I ’ope you’re better, Miss.’

Mrs Fleming answered for her—

‘She is much better. But not well enough to leave this house to-night. She is with friends—old friends. And you will take this message to her father, please.’

As she said this she handed a letter to Hoppy, who regarded it somewhat suspiciously. Was it right to leave his young charge alone in this big Babylon under the care of one who was personally unknown to him. Ruth noticed his hesitation, and in a weak trembling voice said from the sofa—

‘You will do this for *me*, Hoppy. I am with friends, who knew me when I was a little child : friends who love me and whom I love.’

Of course if Miss Ruth said so it must be all right. Nothing was to be gained in arguing with her. But although Hoppy was chivalrous to a degree he could not altogether overlook the possible consequences to himself. What would Mr Gilliat say to him ? He would, at all events, be clear as to how far he was to relate the incidents of the morning.

‘If Mawster asts me, am I to say anything about goin’ to Jerming Street?’

A slight blush overspread Ruth’s face for a moment. How bitterly she felt the humiliation of the deceit. But it was that *he* might be spared pain that she said—

‘You need say nothing of any visit but *this* : Father shall know all very soon.’

‘Orright Miss. Mum’s the word.’

Mrs Fleming hereupon approached him

and offered him a sovereign. But he declined this contribution towards his expenses, and said in a tone of offended dignity,

‘ Eggscuse me, Mum, but the money ain’t coined that ’ud pay me for this ere job.’

So saying, he bid Miss Ruth good-bye once more, and limped out of the room sadly disturbed in mind, but with an unimpaired faith in the Saint of his idolatry, And yet it was strange. She had asked him to lie to her father. At an intimation from her he was ready to pulverise the two tables of stone inscribed with the decalogue. He was prepared to trust all in all, or trust not at all. Still it really *was* bewildering.

On this eventful Monday two distinguished visitors arrived in the village of Wapshot-on-Thames. The Ballymacarret mission had come to an end. The humble pie had been either devoured or administered, and the diplomatists had added to the debt of gratitude owed them by a country, somewhat remiss in acknowledging obligations

of the kind. The mission being ended, and the diplomatists returned, nothing was more natural than that they should repair to Wapshot and call on Miss Dunlop—for Lord Hampton had permitted himself a luxury not always indulged in by men of his class. He had allowed himself to be seriously in love with her who was to be his wife.

O'Lympus was delighted to meet his noble relative, and was pleased also to become acquainted with a young statesman, whose name was already becoming familiar to the public. Nor was this somewhat catholic divine prepared to think any the less of Lord Hampton because of his partiality for sport. The reverend gentleman had frequently been known to avow a distrust of statesmen who were not sportsmen as well. But I take it that his chief interest in the young peer was neither as a statesman nor a sportsman, but as the future husband of his beloved niece.

He narrowly watched the meeting of the

lovers. And although society imposes a reserve on such re-unions when they take place in the presence of others, his reverence had reason to be satisfied that, in this match, the affection of the victims had not been entirely overlooked.

As the afternoon wore on, Carrie remembered some calls which she had to make in the village, and asked Hampton to accompany her, and he, nothing loth, at once assented.

When they had reached the village street, Carrie said, with her usual abruptness—

‘I want to introduce you to a most singular and interesting character.’

Lord Hampton wanted no company save that of Carrie, so he replied—

‘To me singular characters are rarely interesting.’

‘This will be one of the rare instances,’ answered Carrie, with decision.

‘You know that I am your bond slave.

But what is this singular sort of torture to which you would submit me ?'

'An evangelist.'

'Surely my punishment is out of proportion to my offence. And what is his name ?'

'Gilliat.'

Lord Hampton repeated the name, and added—

'I knew a Mr Gilliat when I was a boy. He was a great friend of my poor father's. A Fellow of Merton, and no end of a genius.'

'And I have an idea,' replied Carrie, 'that my Mr Gilliat and your Mr Gilliat are the same. Since he heard of our engagement he asks about you with a kindness that implies friendship and shows an acquaintance with your family, which is not derived solely from Debrett. This is his house.'

Martha, in a state of evident perturbation, opened the door, and Carrie, understanding that Mr Gilliat was in his study, took the

liberty of a privileged friend, and made for that apartment, respectfully followed by Lord Hampton.

It was as Carrie had supposed. The two men, after a moment's hesitation, shook each other warmly by the hand, and began to talk of years ago when his lordship was a little boy. Will it be believed that, in accomplishing this introduction, Miss Dunlop was a schemer? She was a missionary of the world, and in the interest of Dick and Ruth, she would lure the evangelist back to it. What more potent ally could she find than a young peer of distinction and ambition, whose father had been the friend of the sinner whom she meant to convert.

'And how is Ruth, and where is she?' inquired Carrie, breaking into the conversation.

'I have just returned from Reading,' he answered, 'and have not seen her; but as she is not with *you*, I suppose she is at Vicarage Farm. The simple attractions

of her own home seem to have lost much of their charm for her.'

He said this sadly. It was impossible to tell by his accent whether he was reproaching his daughter or blaming himself.

Martha entered the room, still labouring from suppressed excitement, and laid on the table a letter, which, she said, had been left by Hoppy. Without looking at it, Mr Gilliat took it, and placed it near him. His visitors rose to go. He saw them to the door, and expressed the pleasure, no doubt sincere, that it would give him to see Lord Hampton again.

'That man has a history, and you know it,' said Carrie to Lord Hampton, when they had reached the open street.

'It is a very common one, I fear. It is the history of a man who finds out, too late, that he has married the wrong woman.'

'Was she untrue to him, then?' inquired the girl, gravely.

'I believe not. Only frivolous, fond of

admiration, and — worse than all — stage-struck. Gilliat drew the line at the stage. She has a fortune of her own, and left him. Then his friends lost sight of him. It's ten thousand pities, for he was certain to have made his mark in the House of Commons.'

'And the woman—where is she?'

'She lives in London—goes by her maiden name of Fleming, and runs the Oddity Theatre.'

'Why, that's Dick's theatre,' exclaimed Carrie, with irrepressible enthusiasm.

'And who may Dick be?' asked Hampton, with pardonable curiosity.

'You must remember meeting Dick Hook at Claridge's. He writes plays, and is the son of Sir Penton Hook, who dines with us to-day.'

'That is the man who is standing for the County, is it not?'

'The same.'

'A Conservative?'

'Yes.'

‘Don’t you think that, under the circumstances, it would have been more natural if Hook had stood for Eye?’

‘We have it on excellent authority,’ answered Carrie, ‘that a pun is the lowest kind of wit. To which I take the liberty of adding, that a play on a name is the lowest kind of pun.’

‘I plead guilty, and throw myself upon the consideration of the court,’ replied his lordship, smiling. And they passed up together over the Vicarage lawn.

Ballymacarret had sent down his *chef* the day before. For although he admitted that the vicar’s cellar was undeniable, he swore that his cook poisoned him. Sir Penton Hook, who had been bidden to the dinner, was consequently surprised at the quality of the repast set before him. It beat the Riverdale banquets hollow. But what surprised him still more, was the frequency and enthusiasm with which Lord Hampton alluded to Mr Gilliat—his admiration for

his character and genius, his grief at finding him throwing away his powers in the little village of Wapshot.

Hampton was a man of power in the land—and yet this was the style in which he spoke of one whom the little magistrate had always treated with studied contempt. It would appear that Wapshot had been entertaining an angel unawares. This matter must be inquired into.

But all this time, Mr Gilliat himself gave no thought to those whom he had just seen. He went back to his study. He took up the letter which Hoppy had left for him, and he trembled from head to foot as he recognised the handwriting. He tore it open. There were but two lines :—

‘Ruth is quite safe. She is with her Mother.’

He crushed the letter in his hand and rang the bell.

‘Send for Hoppy,’ he said to the terribly agitated Martha, who answered the summons.

But Hoppy was nowhere to be found. That worthy man dreaded an interview with the stern evangelist. He had, therefore, left the letter, and had taken to his heels. He had deposited the dynamite, and had departed with celerity and in silence.

So, without even the historical aid which Hoppy might have afforded as to the episode so curtly summed up in his wife's letter, the broken-hearted man, with lips firmly set, and face quite colourless, sat down in the loneliness of his deserted home to think the matter out.

This second blow had not the same stunning effect of that former one. His confidence in his daughter, up to that moment, had been perfect. Having lost it, she had never altogether regained it. He had followed her movements with anxiety and concern. He had indeed, detected nothing to justify his uneasiness. But he was haunted by a grave suspicion. And now the worst had happened.

Bitter disappointment was the feeling next

in intensity to the sense of bereavement. Had his system of education, then, been a failure? Was he right, after all, in his Puritanic notions as to the unfettered intercourse of the young? Or had he been wrong in impressing on his daughter the insignificance of earthly love. Of course he connected the flight of Ruth to the presence of Hook in London. That one apparently so pure and innocent should be so shameless. That a daughter of his should follow her lover. There must be, he argued, wickedness in such a love.

Was Nature then stronger than the artificial barriers set up before her? Here was the mother's letter. He smoothed its creases and spread it on the table before him. From every line of this, indeed, spoke the voice of Nature. Ruth had hardly known her mother. Her father had been for years her sole guardian, her constant companion. Yet, in a moment she can abandon him for her.

Then this strong-minded man felt his most cherished prejudices giving way. He placed his elbows on the table, and buried his face in his hands, and remained deep in thought.

Presently he arose, locked the door, and went down on his knees and besieged heaven with prayer for light and guidance.

‘All that is dark to us is plain to Thee. Send Thy afflicted servant one ray to illuminate a path that has become as the night. For the sake of Him who died to save us, have pity on me, O Lord. I repine not at the affliction Thou hast seen fit to reserve for me; but grant me strength from heaven to bear it. And, oh, vouchsafe to Thy unworthy servant one inspired idea of his duty in this thing.’

And, after this fashion, he prayed on—asking chiefly for guidance, so that his prayer was partly a confession of his own ignorance. With the highest motives he had failed in the relationship that he

regarded as highest and dearest. Had he misread the Book, straining its teachings unduly, and construing weakness into offence, and natural affection into forbidden indulgence ?

At all events, he had a full belief in the efficacy of prayer. And when he rose from his knees, he was conscious, in the midst of his desolation and despair, of the support of a sustaining presence.

He unlocked the door, and, in calm tones, told Martha—now in a state of mind bordering on insanity—that her young mistress was not coming home that night.

Then he opened the French window and stepped out into the garden, careless of the bitter blast, and the melancholy rattling and creaking of the branches.

CHAPTER III

ONCE AGAIN

NOVEMBER had succeeded October. And London was enveloped in an impenetrable fog. Unweildy barges lay at anchor on the broad, brown bosom of the Thames, their lights beaten back by the opaque barrier without reaching the embankments. In the streets traffic was at a standstill, and strange oaths issued from the lips of the omnibus-drivers. The street lamps, alight at mid-day, shot pale lines of light for a few feet

through the surrounding darkness. And men, wandering in accustomed bye-ways, lost themselves as hopelessly as the novice who essays a forest fastness.

A log-fire burned on the hearth of Mrs Fleming's drawing-room, and Ruth sat at her mother's knee, gazing at the fitful play of the flames. The mother stroked her daughter's head with tender touch. The girl's mind was occupied by many thoughts, and her bewilderment exceeded that of Hoppy's. She had now been more than a week in her mother's house, and she loved her with an intensity not uncommon in such gentle natures.

There had been a letter from her father. The illumination for which that good man had prayed, had not apparently guided him to a favourable view of his daughter's conduct. He dwelt, with severe comment, on the crime of deceit, and told her plainly that she must make up her mind with which of her parents she wished to live. And, as

her decision would affect his own movements, he begged that she would make up her mind at her very earliest convenience.

To this letter Ruth had replied in a long, girlish effusion, full of mistakes and blotted with tears. She begged for time to consider. She had been ill. She was perplexed. She loved her mother very dearly — but she loved her father very dearly too. She wished to do what was right. She wished for more time—that was all. And then, in a post-script, quite unauthorised, she added—‘Mamma, who loves you very dearly too, joins with me in kind wishes.’

To this there came a reply granting further time, but urging despatch in the matter.

Carrie had also written her — having probably elicited the address from Hoppy. It was a comfortable effusion in which the recipient was cheerfully called a ‘silly child,’ for not imparting her confidence to one who loved her. There was some

breezy gossip of a local kind—not the least interesting, being that Lord Hampton had turned out to be a great friend—‘great friend’ underlined—of Mr Gilliat’s. In this communication she had found some balm for her wounds.

But I am afraid that on this dull November day as Ruth sat at her mother’s knees gazing silently at the logs as they gradually became ‘a solid core of heat,’ her mind was not chiefly occupied by her father or by the divided duty she owed her parents. With the strong faith of innocence she looked to the chapter of accidents to bring her father and mother together again. About that she felt at ease. They were both too good, too clever, to be for ever separated from each other.

Thoughts of Dick were those that gave her the most uneasiness. When she had confided her half-guessed secret to her mother, that estimable matron comforted her with a reasonable explanation of the

Parsons episode ; explained to a mind utterly unversed in this sort of knowledge the nature and necessity of rehearsals.

Although her mother imparted this information the girl was but half-convinced. The scene had made so vivid an impression upon her that it was not to be wiped out by any theory drawn from the theatre. No, Dick was false to her. Besides, had he not deceived her in the letter ? It was his handwriting. In that she could not be mistaken. No. She would forget all about him. And then she heaved a sigh which gave the lie direct to the highly commendable resolution.

On the matter of the letter Mrs Fleming, without disclosing the fact of Ruth's presence in town, had managed to elicit from Dick that he had written no letter to anyone in Wapshot, saying that he was ill, and in trouble.

'I was never ill. I'm not in trouble. Why should I tell anybody I was?' he asked, in his frank, downright way ; and, indeed, it

did not need this declaration to convince Mrs Fleming that there was some mystery in connection with the letter which brought Ruth to town.

She broke the silence that had reigned for a space, by asking—

‘Have you any enemies in London, Ruth?’

The girl turned round and looked at her mother with a scared expression, and said—

‘Oh! no. I have never done anyone an injury. I can have no enemy.’

Happy ignorance of the world! She did not know that her very virtues were calculated to raise up enemies for her.

‘And Mr Hook—has he any enemies?’ went on the elder lady.

‘I am sure he cannot have. No one could hate him.’

Here she betrayed the symptoms of breaking down. But she battled against those feelings sufficiently to be able to inquire—

‘Why do you ask such terrible questions?’

‘Because, Ruth, darling, I have been comparing the letter which brought you to London with a note of Mr Hook’s, written to myself. The letter is an imitation. The similarity of the handwriting is considerable. But it does not take a very skilled expert to discover ineradicable differences.’

Ruth shook her head sadly.

‘Do not deceive yourself, mother. Once a week, on every Sunday morning, Dick wrote to me. This letter came in the usual way, and, in its turn, addressed to Miss Westaway.’

‘And who is Miss Westaway?’ inquired Mrs Fleming, suspiciously.

‘One of my best friends, and one of the best of women.’

It did not occur to the good lady to inquire after Mr Westaway—that best of men. And thinking it useless, for the present, to pursue the question of the forgery, she tried another method of restoring Ruth’s con-

fidence in that perfidious lover, whose faithlessness she had witnessed. Still stroking the thick, soft masses of her daughter's hair, she said—

‘If you were persuaded that the words you heard Miss Parsons speak to Dick were merely parrot-like utterances, being learned by heart for repetition in a play—what then?’

‘How can I be persuaded?’ she asked—not averse, apparently, to the reception of such proof positive as would overcome the evidence of eye and ear.

‘By seeing the play; it will be produced to-night.’

‘I will not go to a play-house,’ she answered, with a determined closure of the mouth. ‘My father says it is wicked.’

‘And your mother,’ answered she, in a tone of reproach, ‘says that it is *not* wicked. Art of any kind, may be good, bad, or indifferent as art. Or wicked people may use it for bad ends—just as they may use poetry

or pictures. Nay, even the works of God, the most beautiful results of Nature may be pressed into the service of the devil.'

Hitherto Ruth had been troubled by no such disquisitions. She pressed her hand on her forehead and sighed. Her mother stooped and kissed her. And then, descending from the general to the particular, she tried surer ground.

'Besides,' she continued, 'I only ask you to see Mr Hook's play. You do not think that he would write anything wicked?'

Forgetting all about the letter, which was the occasion of her present distress, she replied, with warmth—

'Indeed—indeed, he could not.'

'Then we will go and see his play—in justice to him.'

There was a long pause. Her father's teachings, her own prejudices, her early views all condemned the theatre as being one of Satan's most notorious strongholds. Her mother's assurances, her desire if pos-

sible to absolve her lover, and that lurking sentiment of curiosity which is innate in the very purest female heart, urged her assent. So after long pondering she evaded responsibility in the matter by saying submissively,

‘If you say that I am to go, I will go.’

‘Spoken like my own child. And now we will ring for a cup of tea and order the brougham at seven.

Ruth rose and walked to the window. The fog was slowly lifting. The impassable solidity had given way. It had become gray and cloudy like the river mists on the upper reaches. If the shadows would only lift from her own life!

And in the shadows lurked enemies. So her mother had suggested. She shuddered at that thought, and marvelled at the great wickedness that was in the world. For why should any one wish to harm her, or Dick — at the mention of whose name she once more sighed? Supposing too, that the

letter really was a forgery, the wicked work of one of the enemies concealed by the shadows. She would test the evidence afforded by Dick's play. Then, perhaps, she might be in a frame of mind not indisposed to consider evidence with regard to Dick's letter.

She left the window and approached the piano. It was the first time she had opened the instrument, and her mother regarded the act as a favourable omen. She sang in a sweet tremulous voice an old Scotch melody, commencing—

‘There’s nae Covenantin’ noo, lassie,’

but she broke down. It had been a favourite of her father's, and its associations called up that lonely man, with none but Martha to wait on him. It recalled her neglected school-children, and the library,⁷ and poor Hoppy possibly lapsing from the paths of virtue. She got up from the piano, and throwing her arms round her mother, sobbed on her shoulder, saying,

‘ Oh, mother, it’s so hard to know what is the right thing to do.’

Her mother spoke reassuring words to her, drawing her on to think of the future—which, she said, would be happy for all of them and alluding as little as possible to the immediate past. So the hours went on until it was time to dress for the theatre.

When they arrived at the Oddity not a few of the loafers about the entrance were attracted by the beauty of the two women. Chubby and other ‘old chappies’ smoking cigarettes in the vestibule, wondered who the doose Mrs Fleming had got with her now. And Aaron the *Tipster* critic made some highly improbable suggestions evolved out of the foul depths of his imagination. Then he sniggered and rattled his gold bangles and walked off; Chubby observing to the other old chappies when he was out of hearing,

‘ What an awful little cad that Aaron is.’

This proposition being carried *nemine contradicente* all the chappies threw away the

ends of their cigarettes, adjusted their shirt cuffs, held their necks with extra rigidity in their collars, and marched solemnly off to their stalls in single file like the wild Indians of the West.

Ruth was quite ignorant of the attraction her passage along the corridors had occasioned. She seemed to see nothing till she was seated in the box and then her surroundings took shape gradually. Her taste was by no means met in the yellow satin of the upholstery. And she considered the masterpieces of Thrupp on the panels and ceiling atrocious examples of modern art. Such decorations had never been previously submitted to her judgment. But she possessed an inherited taste which answered to the call on the first opportunity.

She was disappointed also in the dimensions of the theatre. Such allusions to the drama as she had casually encountered had prepared her for a vast proscenium, wide spaces, fluted pillars, a lofty dome. The pro-

portions of this little puppet show oppressed her. Dick should have had a nobler edifice in which to offer the first fruits of his genius.

Nor was the music issuing from a subterranean orchestra at all to her liking—although she was obliged to admit that it harmonised well with the loud colours and the offensive excess of gilding and yellow satin.

When the orchestra ceased, Mrs Fleming directed her child's attention to the stage. The curtain rose, and from that moment until the moment it descended, she never for an instant took her eyes from the performers. Never had anything half so beautiful or half so witty been penned by mortal man. What wonder that a creature so gifted should have grown tired of a stupid little country girl like herself.

She waited and waited as the brisk repartee was kept flying from one to another, like a very shuttlecock. At last Baby Parsons—whom she considered really a

clever actress—came to the well-remembered sentence, and delivered it in the well-remembered way, like a parrot. ‘I love you dearly, indeed, indeed, I do,’ said Miss Parsons. Ruth extended her hand and pressed her mother’s. She had been convinced; but she did not take her eyes off the stage till the curtain fell. And then, when Dick was called, and the audience applauded and he bowed, she felt she could have cried with sheer pride and pleasure.

‘And now, my dear,’ said Mrs Fleming, ‘I have sent for him, and he is coming up to us.’

Indeed, when the designing mother perceived that Ruth was convinced, she had despatched a pencilled note to him—

‘Come to my box after the first piece. I have a surprise for you.’

Poor Ruth trembled like a leaf; but she trembled with the joy of anticipation. Her fears as to the sin of theatre-going had been dissipated. She had room in her heart for

but one thought—he was near. She should see him—hear him speak.

There was a tapping at the panel of the box door, and in a moment it opened, and Dick stood within, his eyes sparkling with pleasure, his face radiant with triumph. As he shook Mrs Fleming's hand and bent over her, he did not recognise the other lady sitting in the shadow of the box. And her heart sank within her. What if he, too, disapproved of her suddenly awakened dramatic tastes. Mrs Fleming whispered something to him. He examined more closely the shrinking, frightened figure in the corner.

‘Ruth ! you here !’

But it was surprise, not reproach, and he had caught hold of both her hands, and was shaking them with the delight of a great school-boy. Had it been any other place in the world he would have kissed her. But these little boxes were right in sight of the audience, and he was conscious that little

Aaron had his *lorgnette* turned on the box. He was looking-out for paragraphs.

Then Dick glanced inquiringly at his hostess, and said—

‘But, Mrs Fleming, I did not know that you and Ruth were friends.’

‘Mrs Fleming is my stage name. To-night I abandon it forever. I am Mrs Gilliat, and Ruth is my daughter.’

He dropped Ruth’s hands now, and began shaking those of Mrs Gilliat with wonderful earnestness — saying the while, with his usual indiscretion and impulsiveness—

‘Then I may marry her. You’ve no objection, have you, Mrs Fl— Mrs Gilliat?’

‘We will speak again of that. Help us on with our wraps. We shall not stay for the burlesque.’

Dick dutifully did as he was desired—probably spending a great deal more time than was absolutely necessary in getting Ruth’s cloak comfortably settled on her shoulders.

‘And now,’ went on Mrs Gilliat—for, as

she has chosen to re-adopt that title, we must follow her example—‘you may show us to the carriage.’

Out through the corridor and through the clouds of cigarette smoke, and past Chappies and Chubbies innumerable as the sands of the shore and as similar, past Aaron, who whispered to some brother Israelite that young Hook was evidently ‘mashed,’ and out into the bleak November night, where the brougham was drawn up in readiness.

When Dick had seen them seated the fair protectress of Ruth said to him,

‘You will come and lunch with us to-morrow at two. We have much to tell you. Now, run off to your club and hear what your good-natured friends say of your comedy—which Ruth here thinks is the most wonderful work of the age. *Au revoir.*’

She drew up the carriage window, and they were soon rattling through the cold, cheerless streets.

Jim Gates, who hung about the Oddity a

good deal now, hoping perhaps to borrow a trifle from Baby Parsons on her arrival or departure, was one of the loafers who witnessed this little scene, and he somehow felt that his scheme had not turned out quite in the way he had expected. The lovers had looked happy enough. Still, he reflected, while there's life there's hope, and the plot has not yet, perhaps, reached its final development. Wait—only wait.

CHAPTER IV

GOOD-NATURED FRIENDS

ALTHOUGH we visited the theatre we saw nothing of Dick's play. Our interest was centred in the little drama taking place in the box. Nor indeed is it necessary to devote a chapter to a description of the comedietta. My own impression is that had Hook been destined to become a joker for his daily bread, his fame would scarcely have eclipsed that of Sheridan.

He could sketch character with a light hand, he had a pretty wit, and was able to

turn out a meritorious couplet upon occasion. But in the higher dramatic faculty he was deficient.

Although I cannot give my own verdict on a play which I confess I never saw, and as I should be sorry that you should adopt Ruth's, I may here reproduce the more sound and scholarly opinions of Hook's contemporaries of the Otway. Those excellent fellows expressed their views with great candour and good nature, on the very night on which the work was produced. A certain fitness will be conceded in throwing the conversation into a dramatic shape :—

SCENE—The Otway ; TIME—11.30 P.M.

CHARACTERS : Pepper and Magee, Dramatic critics ; Spratt and Dumps, Dramatic authors ; Crutch and Toothpick, Patrons of the drama ; John, a Waiter.

PEPPER. He's a fraud ; that's what's the matter with Hook. Construction bad, dialogue worse, characters worse than all.

MAGEE. Faith, Pepper, you've met wid worse characters in your toime, I'll go bail.

PEPPER. Certainly, I've met Hook himself.

CRUTCH. John! Hot water. Dammit!

DUMPS (*hopefully*). The thing was damned, then?

PEPPER. Well, not exactly, you know.

SPRATT. The pit was all paper, with a claue in the gallery applauding desperately in the wrong places.

TOOTHPICK. Little Parsons was awf'ly jolly, though. Dash it, I applauded in the wrong place myself, and I couldn't help it, dash it! An' I think Hook is an awf'ly clever fellow, an' his piece an awf'ly clever piece.

CRUTCH. John! Sugar. Dammit.

MAGEE. You ought to get Toothpick on your payriodical, Pepper. He has the brevity of a Hazlitt, and the brilliancy of an *Era* critic.

TOOTHPICK. If I *were* a critic, I wouldn't

run down a play in the smokin'-room, an' run it up in the newspapers, as *you* fellows do, dash it !

MAGEE. Excellent shot, i' faith !

PEPPER. By the way, Magee, Hook has crammed his farce with good things of yours.

SPRATT. Which may, perhaps, account for its failure.

MAGEE. Well, Spratt, me boy, you can lay your hand on your heart, and solemnly declare that no author was ever damned for stealing *your* good things.

DUMPS. What's the play about ?

PEPPER. It's about the poorest adaptation from the French ever foisted on a long suffering public.

ALL (*eagerly*). From what play ?

PEPPER. I—ah—forget the title ; but it's an insignificant trifle by one of the Palais Royal lot, you know.

ALL (*dejectedly*). Ah !

SPRATT. Joke of the thing is you press

fellows will have the whole affair, chapter and verse, in to-morrow's papers. Where the doose d'ye get your information?

DUMPS. Haydn's 'Dictionary of Dates,' 'Men of the Time,' and Bartlett's 'Dictionary of Quotations.' The pressman who, on the strength of possessing those inestimable manuals, does not consider himself capable of dealing with any subject in the world, is unworthy of the name of journalist.

PEPPER. My dear Dumps, if your comedies were only as full of good things as your conversation, what a success you would be.

TOOTHPICK (*opportunely interrupting*). Dash it, I think little Parsons is goin' off, don't you know?

MAGEE. Goin' off. Not wid *you*, Toothy?

TOOTHPICK. Dash it—no. I mean goin' a bit off colour, don't you know?

MAGEE. Parsons is pining for Toothy—that's it. Me friend Hook has given her one bad character, an' Toothpick is anxious to supply her wid another.

TOOTHPICK. I say, old fellow, what are you up to?

CRUTCH. John! Snuff. Dammit!

DUMPS. When you fellows have done interchanging what you are pleased to consider witticisms, p'r'aps you'll let Pepper loose at Hook.

MAGEE. An', be the powers, Pepper 'ull let him have it hot.

(General leaning back in chairs, puffing of cigars, and sipping of hot grog.)

PEPPER. Hook's plot is the most clumsy thing ever written—I mean stolen. Of course there's a lot of spooning and all that. But the characters are eternally standing in a row, while another character preaches to them.

MAGEE. From which I infer that had ye seen *Othello* for the furst toime, you'd condimn it on artistic grounds, because a lot of ould gentlemen sit in a row, while a black bully rants at them.

PEPPER. The black bully always talked to

the purpose, which is more than some people do, *mon ami*. Well, there's a lot of turgid dialogue relieved here and there by the introduction of some of Magee's second best conversational *mots*. Then the lovers fall out.

CRUTCH. John ! A spill. Dammit !

PEPPER. The rest of the precious work is consumed in getting the spoons together again, which gives us another ten minutes of talkee-talkee, conceived in the most twaddly vein conceivable.

ALL. Poor Hook !

PEPPER. When the curtain went down, there was the usual sort of thing. Calls for everybody, bouquets for Baby Parsons, rounds of applause, roars of 'Ohthaw, Oh, thaw !' to which Hook responded, blushing till his face looked as if it was painted as thick as the raddled cheeks of Parsons herself.

DUMPS. Conceited ass !

SPRATT. Wretched young idiot !

MAGEE. An' here he comes. Now, gentlemen, for a further expression of yer valuable opinions.

Enter Hook.

PEPPER: (*shaking hands with Hook, and speaking in a voice that trembles with honest emotion*). I congratulate you my boy. It's the most promising first effort I ever witnessed.

HOOK: (*blushing with pride*). Thank you so much Mr Pepper.

PEPPER. If you never write another line Hook, the production of to-night ought to carry your name down to posterity.

CRUTCH. John! Spittoon. Dammit.

DUMPS. By the way Hook, Pepper forgets the name of your play. What is it?

SPRATT. And he also forgets the name of the French original. What's *that*?

MAGEE. An' he's bothered entirely as to which of my jokes tickled the audience most.

HOOK. John!

JOHN. Yessir.

HOOK. A couple of kidneys and a pint of St Julien.

JOHN. Yessir.

HOOK. But really, Mr Pepper, did you think it had any merit in it.

PEPPER. There can be no two opinions about it.

SPRATT. An ambiguous compliment.

HOOK. I was afraid that I had led up rather clumsily to the lovers' quarrel.

PEPPER. Never saw anything like it off the French stage.

DUMPS. Nor on it either, I'll be bound.

HOOK. The dialogue towards the close wants brightening, don't you think?

PEPPER. Briskest fire of repartee I ever heard. I thought Toothpick would have died of laughing, and the concluding situation is the most ingenious device since Sheridan's famous screen scene.

SPRATT. Paying audience, I suppose?

HOOK. Every stall was booked in ad-

vance, and I don't believe there was a free seat in the house — except those of the critics.

SPRATT (*Aside*). Beastly lie ! (*Aloud*). Ah ! So Pepper has been telling us.

HOOK. Did I look nervous when I came before the footlights, Mr Pepper ? By the way, what will you have to drink ? A brandy and soda for Mr Pepper, John. I felt as though I should faint when I faced the audience.

PEPPER. Well, to tell you the truth you *did* look a trifle pale, but the unmistakeable enthusiasm of the audience pulled you together, and I thought you went through the ordeal with considerable fortitude. And now that the comedietta is fairly started I see no reason why, as things are ordered in these days, it shouldn't run for half-a-century.

SPRATT. Except that the manager is reading a psychological operetta by me.

DUMPS. And that he is in treaty with me for a mythological tragedy.

MAGEE. An' I intind thryin' him wid a thayological farce.

PEPPER. Your health, Hook. And I wish you every success in your new career. You have gained what we all work for.

CRUTCH. John! Money. Dammit.

CHAPTER V

‘AND MAKE TWO LOVERS HAPPY’

LIGHT-HEARTED, mercurial, and with an enviable absence of any feeling of responsibility, Dick was perfectly happy as he sat at lunch, rattling on, with eager artlessness, on any topic that came uppermost. He had, as we have seen, repaired to the Otway the night before, to hear the more or less reliable opinion of the critics. He had afterwards gone to the Junior Baliol, where he played Nap until the small hours with Chubby and

his friends. Those solemn pursuers of pleasure were astonished at the phenominal flow of his spirits. The mere success of a little one-act piece could scarcely account for his elation. He laughed when he lost. He laughed when he won. He drank more wine than was quite good for him. And, indeed, he displayed a levity of spirit and loudness of style which at once surprised and scandalised his staid companions.

Chubby and his friends were right in attributing the hilarious demonstrations of Dick to other causes than the success of his little play. But they were wrong if they attributed his condition to wine. Dick was in a seventh heaven. His last letter to Ruth had remained unanswered. He had been torturing himself with thoughts of her possible illness. He had determined, if he did not hear in the morning, to go down to Wapshot and make inquiries on the spot. And, as if in answer to his wishes, she had appeared in person with a ready-made

mother, who evidently approved heartily of his matrimonial designs.

He rose early and read the few notices of his piece which appeared. Pepper was by no means so enthusiastic in print as he had been at the Otway. But D’Arcy Magee made that eminently judicial organ, *Jupiter Tonans*, responsible for alluding to the fact of his having joined the ranks of playwrights as ‘ a distinct gain to the stage of the period, and an interesting, if not important, event in the dramatic annals of the country.’

He had arrived at Mrs Gilliat’s house in Kensington, half-an-hour before his time. And now that he was at lunch seated facing the object of his affection he conversed about irrelevant topics in a way that delighted Ruth and somewhat astonished his hostess.

‘ What, is that wine ? ’ he inquired—for Mrs Gilliat followed the custom adopted in all Christian houses, and had her champagne brought to table decanted—“ Pfungst,” did you say ? Capital wine. I must make them

get it at the Junior Baliol. Not too dry. Just dry enough. Some fellows like their wine so dry that upon my word I wonder they don't substitute soda water which is quite as nasty, and ever so much cheaper. "Pfungst" goes remarkably well with pheasant, I notice. And it's a pleasant alliteration. Yes, John. I'll have another glass of our friend "Pfungst," if you please.'

Many distinguished guests had sat at that table. Lord Macænas had discoursed of poets whom he had discovered—wild singing men of the woods to whom he had afforded the shelter of the Athenæum. Mr B. had here uttered unintelligible rhapsodies. C. the celebrated comedian had exchanged repartee with D. the dramatist. And a host of notabilities had appeared there exhibiting their paces, airing their eccentricities, and advertising their wares by means of the puff oblique. But the most brilliant assembly that had ever sat round her table never con-

tributed a tithe of the pleasure which these two children were affording her now.

The distractions of society, the excitement of the stage, the conversation of men of light and leading—what were they after all when compared with the humbler but more sacred enjoyment of the domestic relations. Mr B's epigrams never touched the heart. The criticisms of Lord Macænas were forgotten as soon as uttered. But the dissertation of a connoisseur scarcely out of his teens on the moot and momentous question of dry champagnes caused her to experience a thrill of genuine emotion. For the first time since she left her husband's roof she felt at home.

When lunch was at an end the three drew up to the fire, where the sparks from the logs were reflected in the burnished steel of the fender, and lit up the encaustic tiles that filled up the walls of the fireplace with pictures from Shakspeare's comedies, and played with the plate on the sideboard, and flashed now and then on the oil paintings, revealing a head

hidden in shadow, or an arm indiscernible by the dull illumination of unaided daylight.

After the servants had left the room the hostess, gazing upon her young guests with a delicious feeling of proprietorship, said,

‘I am afraid we are playing the parts of three conspirators.’

‘Conspiracy in so sweet a cause,’ urged Dick, whose logic, as we have aforetime discovered, was by no means faultless, ‘becomes a positive duty.’

‘Then perhaps, Master Richard, you will advise what is to be done.’

To Dick everything seemed plain sailing. His mind was made up at once.

‘You see,’ he went on, ‘Ruth and I have been engaged for years and years.’

‘Not two years yet, Dick,’ corrected Ruth, who knew the chronology of their courtship to an hour.

‘It *seems* years and years,’ explained Richard, in a tone that was eminently

satisfactory to Ruth. ‘But our engagement was unauthorised. Now I can formally ask you for Ruth’s hand, and you can give your consent. The ceremony can be fixed for an early date—no fuss—a breakfast at the “Star and Garter,” and—and there you are, don’t you know.’

Mrs Gilliat smiled as she listened to the easy and off-hand manner in which he settled his destiny; but she shook her head gravely.

‘You construct plays more carefully than you do the plots of real life.’

‘I think the *dénouement* is all that can be desired.’

‘It is no doubt very charming,’ replied the mother, ‘but you lead up to it with undramatic suddenness. Moreover, it has one fatal fault.

‘What is that?’ asked Dick, in a tone of the utmost astonishment—for he thought that for triumphant ingenuity his suggestion was unequalled.

‘You have omitted some of the principal characters in the comedy.’

‘If you mean my parent,’ said Dick, with profound sadness, ‘there’s no use including him in the cast. He declines any character save that of the Roman father.’

‘I have less fear of his opposition than of that of my husband. There are influences at work which may affect Sir Penton. Mr Gilliat’s prejudices are more deeply rooted.’

Richard, who regarded his father as the very embodiment of irrational hostility to all that is romantic and reasonable, sceptically inquired as to the influences which could possibly move a parent whom he ruefully compared with the rock of Gibraltar for power of resistance.

‘The influences are chiefly social,’ replied the lady. ‘From what I can learn of his character, Sir Penton will not be insensible to Lord Hampton’s openly avowed friendship with and admiration for my husband. Hitherto he has probably regarded him as

a demagogue and a ranter. He will now know him to be a scholar and a gentleman—and a man, moreover, boasting a pedigree more distinguished than that of Sir Penton himself.’

Richard accepted the reflection on his genealogical tree with great meekness, and Mrs Gilliat proceeded.

‘Then the influences of a contested election are of a somewhat levelling character. Sir Penton may find it advisable to acquire my husband’s support. John’s hold upon those whom he has befriended or instructed is sure to be strong.’

It was the first time that she had used her husband’s Christian name in speaking of him, and as she did so, a deep blush suffused her beautiful features.

All this talk about influences, social and political, was not at all to the taste of Master Richard. It seemed to project events into the remote future. He expressed his dissatisfaction with his customary frankness.

‘On behalf of the children, I am for acting without consulting the fathers. The fathers will come round. What do you think, Ruth?’

That sweet entity would have given worlds to have said—

‘I agree with you, Dick.’

But she saw the strength of her mother’s arguments, and she knew the depth of the love that suggested them. There was no coquetry in her answer—

‘I’m quite sure that mother must be right, Dick. And you will think so by and by.’

Dick bit his lip, and made as near an approach to sulking as was possible to his nature.

‘Besides,’ went on Mrs Gilliat, ‘there are some minor matters which want clearing up. You have enemies—you two.’

‘Enemies!’ exclaimed Dick, in unmitigated astonishment, and glancing at Ruth.

Then Mrs Gilliat narrated the story of the letter which had brought her daughter to

town, and produced the document for Dick's inspection.

‘The scoundrels!’ he muttered. ‘And you went to my rooms?’ he asked.

It was Ruth's turn to blush now.

‘Yes. And it nearly killed me, Dick. For the door was open and I walked in. And then I heard your voice. And then I heard the voice of a woman saying she loved you. And I saw the woman. Then I remember turning away and running. And I remember nothing more till I awoke and found my mother.’

‘And you really doubted me, even for a moment,’ said Dick, in an injured tone.

‘You must admit, Richard,’ said Mrs Gilliat, amused at the utterly unreasonable nature of Dick's astonishment ‘that the circumstances unexplained were somewhat against you.’

He laughed—

‘This is one of the awful consequences of a private rehearsal. If the story got to the

Otway how delighted Dumps would be—how overjoyed the gentle Spratt. And my poor Ruth,' he added in a gentler tone, 'how you must have suffered.'

'I thought that I would die. I wished that I would die.'

Great tears started to her eyes. But he was by her side to kiss her ere they fell.

Having accomplished this simple act of charity, he said in a business-like manner by no means habitual to him.

'And now about the forger of this letter. It must be someone well acquainted with my handwriting. Who *can* it be?'

'Why trouble about him, Dick? He meant to do us harm perhaps. But he has unconsciously been the author of our happiness.'

'That's all very well,' replied Dick, with a grave judicial air, 'but I must act on public grounds. The man who cultivates this sort of imitative faculty is a danger to society. Next time perhaps we'll have him

presenting an imitation of my signature to my banker.’

There was silence for a space broken only by the crackling of the logs in the grate and in the silence a vehicle was heard to draw up at the gate, and the bell violently agitated resounded through the house.

‘A visitor,’ said Mrs Gilliat. ‘I am not at home to visitors to-day.’

The visitor, however, was not for the mistress of the house.

‘A lady to see Miss Gilliat,’ said the servant, handing a card to that young person.

‘Miss Dunlop!’ exclaimed Ruth, in a tremor of delight, ‘oh pray, show her in at once. That is, if I may, mother.’

‘Of course, my child. I shall be delighted to make her acquaintance.’

On that dull day her brilliant entrance had all the cheering and exhilarating effect of a ray of sunshine, and after her introduction to Mrs Gilliat she proceeded without delay to open her budget of news.

‘We came back to-day, and I came straight on here. And I really have such a lot to tell you I don’t know where to begin. Ask me something—somebody.’

But although each would have liked to put a question, all were silent, and Carrie went on :

‘First of all, Sir Penton is in a towering rage. Davis, a Radical grower of hops, has put up for the division—his cause in Wapshot being mainly represented by Hoppy. He told me so himself—I mean Hoppy told me. There has been a terrible row about money between Mark Westaway and Gates, and in the height of a quarrel Mark let out that Gates had written a letter purporting to come from you to Ruth.’

The lovers interchanged glances.

‘That is the enemy, then,’ said Dick, with a sneer.

‘But that which I wanted to speak to you most of all about is your father. Ruth, dear, he is pining for your presence. I don’t

suppose any one is more in his confidence than I am. He is distressed. He is becoming absolutely ill.’

Mrs Gilliat’s face turned pale, as she gazed intently at the visitor. And when this half-suggestion to her child to return to Wapshot was made she instinctively drew nearer to her.

‘I know that I am acting without any great apparent respect for the *convenances*. But I love and respect Mr Gilliat so much that I would do almost anything to secure his happiness.’

‘And in such transactions my happiness, I suppose is not to be consulted,’ said Mrs Gilliat, ‘nor hers’—pointing to Ruth.

‘Indeed, indeed,’ pleaded Carrie, grieved at the effect of her words, ‘I did not mean to offend you. But he is so lonely—and he loves her so much. His life is so sad—and, this one ray of sunlight removed, so dark.’

The evident sincerity of Carrie’s emotion, her enthusiastic belief in the evangelist, and

the natural kindness of her manner overcame the repugnance and alarm with which her suggestion about Ruth's return had filled Mrs Gilliat. She rose, and, extending her hand frankly to Carrie, said—

‘Pardon my rudeness, Miss Dunlop. It seemed so hard to give up my child so soon after finding her. But you are right. Ruth shall return to her father.’

Then after a pause—

‘I will take her to him.’

.

CHAPTER VI

A CELEBRITY AT HOME

Was Polly happier now than when she drew beer for bumpkins behind her father's bar? Then she had to work hard. Her finery was of an unfashionable and provincial kind. Her jewelry was pinchbeck. Her boots were manufactured by the local cobbler. Now—God help us!—she was an actress. She had dresses from Wörth, boots from Pinet, and diamonds from every retailer in Bond Street and Piccadilly. At home she had lived greatly on beans and bacon, and when she

had occasion to walk forth must needs trudge it through the mud. Now she could command for every meal the delicacies in or out of season ; and if she went out she made use of a victoria when the weather was fine, and a brougham when it rained.

Do those who are responsible for the tomfoolery known as the Church and Stage Guild imagine that Polly and her sisters in the profession purchase such luxuries out of their slender salaries of a guinea a week ? Are they so innocent as to believe that Polly is an exceptional instance ? Or that with the majority of 'chorus-ladies' the word actress is not merely an expression to cover another sort of profession altogether ?

Herein indeed, is discernible the reason why Polly was less happy than when officiating in a country tavern, varying the monotony of life by an occasional tending of the paternal pigs. Her diamonds, her carriages, her establishment were a price. But a price with which she was unable to re-purchase

contentment. In the stage as a profession she found no relief. She was without the ambition or the ability to make the drama a distraction. In forgetfulness she found a counterfeit peace. In excitement she experienced a fictitious joy.

Also, there was present always an anxious looking forward to the future. Aristocratic passions are short-lived and lordlings eventually seek their own social level. These thoughts gave to her luxurious surroundings an air of unreality. There will come a time, she reflects, when Rugby's passion—

‘Shall have spent its novel force.’

Then the Buhl Cabinets, the grand piano, the expensive rugs, and the dry champagnes, will melt into thin air. Polly was becoming a woman of the world, and consequently was bound with becoming prudence to look ahead. She made unto herself friends of the Mammon of Unrighteousness, of whom Lord Rugby knew nothing, and she hoped for the

best. But, strange to say, although her circle of acquaintances included those whom the world calls gentlemen, her affection was never seriously engaged. She neither understood nor appreciated their attentions. Her heart went out to the Cad—as is the habit with the hearts of her engaging sisterhood.

There is, I fear, under these circumstances, no difficulty in answering my initial question. There is a fever of gaiety, an excitement of wine, a distraction of change. But there is no happiness. The quiet waters of the Thames sleeping under the willows at Wapshot; the brown face of the ferryman; the red tiles of the church; and the voices of the village children—these will sometimes seem and sound to her through the fumes and above the laughter. At such moments in the profit and loss account of her life, the balance seems all on one side.

It is nearly two o'clock on Sunday

morning, and Polly is driven up to her house in the Regent's Park neighbourhood. It is a late locality, and other vehicles rattle through the mist, depositing other burdens. She descends, diffusing sweet odours through the thick night air, and, on being admitted, proceeds straight to the drawing-room, followed by her maid. In this apartment, acting upon the code of Bohemia, she proceeds to disrobe herself. Her dress being removed, she throws herself back in an easy chair, displaying, to great advantage, those perfections of arm and breast for which she is famous, while the maid unbuttons her boots, and adjusts her dainty slippers.

‘Any letters, Julia?’

‘Yes, my lady—three.’

In the absence of Lord Rugby, Julia makes a point of calling Polly ‘my lady.’ And Polly finding it very pleasant and soothing does not forbid it.

‘Bring them to me.’

Julia departs returning with the three

missives on a salver. Polly turns them over wearily and sighs. She has been to a supper after the theatre and her head aches. But the correspondence must be gone through. Such station as that of Polly has, you see, its duties as well as its privileges.

The first is from Lord Rugby from Paris. His lordship is detained in that delightful capital. He may be detained for a week—perhaps for a longer period.

‘Short and cool,’ reflects Polly. But she also reflects that Ruggy by no means shines as a correspondent. He is essentially a man of few words and it may be admitted at the same time that his words are numerically equal to his ideas. She carefully examines the cheque contained in the letter and observing that it is quite in order—Ruggy is such a careless old chappie in drawing cheques—she places it in her bosom observing with a sort of pitying appreciation—

‘What a good old boy it is.’

Letter the Second is from Captain Lantor,

Lord Rugby's most intimate friend. He suggests to the young lady that she may possibly feel lonely during the enforced absence of his lordship, and that if she is experiencing that sensation he will be most happy to take her on Sunday for a drive somewhere and a quiet bit of dinner. And he concludes, 'I have much to tell you.' Possibly the Captain thought that the temptation of the jaunt and the dinner would be insufficient, so he piqued her curiosity.

'I will go with him' she said, quietly, 'he amuses me. Julia, I want John to go round to Captain Landor with a note the first thing in the morning. And you had better write it for me now.'

For Julia was an accomplished pen woman, which Polly undoubtedly was not. The letter was written with much yawning on the part of the amanuensis and then Polly proceeded to open the third communication, and as she did so a blush that was not

preceptible under the colour of her cheeks spread over her neck and shoulders.

Yes. She loved that man. His persistent persecution annoyed her because it might interfere with her worldly interests. She resented his visits to the house as being calculated to remove that establishment from her possession. And she was grieved that he should so continually make inroads on her purse. But notwithstanding her protests to himself, or the complaints concerning his conduct which she made to her companions, he was lord of her heart and none other ruled there.

That letter of many pages she would take to her bedroom, whither she now repaired, followed by the faithful Julia. And at the door of that cheerful apartment we respectfully take leave of the latest light of the London stage.

I have no such liking for the character of Jim Gates, as to reproduce in this place any literary performance of his. His letters

were like himself, vulgar, highly-coloured, bumptious, and insincere.

Jim, it seems, had become thoroughly dissatisfied with the efforts of Mark to raise money. He had quite matured his plans in the matter of turf prophecy. He envied the fortunes of Jacobson of the *Tipster*, Wales the 'Plunger,' and other successful vaticinators. With the necessary capital to commence operations he also would become independent and perhaps powerful. It was quite ridiculous that at this moment his sire should fail him. So he put an epistolary screw on that recalcitrant man in the first instance, and that having failed to produce the desired effect he had run down to Wapshot to interview, and if necessary, intimidate the old gentleman.

Brandy and worry were making rapid strides in the work of demolition going on in Mark's brain. And when Jim succeeded in tracking the venerable sportsman, he found him in no humour to be lectured. All the

good feeling that had been engendered by a fellowship in crime was swept away. Mark upbraided the young man; expressed his open contempt for his schemes; and desired to be relieved of his further acquaintance. The interview took place on the open road, and was overheard by a character who has figured somewhat prominently in these pages.

‘I’ve done with you, and your plans too,’ said Mark, with emphasis.

‘Are you mad?’ asked Jim.

‘Not that I know of. I *was* mad, though, ever to believe a word you said. You who’ve led me on to disgrace, and made me a partner in plans that have failed.’

‘But this plan won’t fail. It can’t fail. And the sum is so paltry.’

Here one of his occasional fits of rage got hold of the worldly man.

‘To hell with you, I say. Leave me, can’t you?’

‘You promised me.’

‘Then I break my promise. D’ye hear. And, by heavens, I’ll break your head if you mention it again to me.’

‘I should protect myself,’ answered Jim, with a swagger.

‘You, you coward,’ sneered the father.

‘You thief,’ retorted the son.

Mark made a blow at Jim, who jumped nimbly so as to avoid it, and the old man fell forward to the ground and lay there. Jim cursed at the prostrate figure, and walked leisurely in the direction of the railway station, leaving Hoppy to raise him from the dust and attend to his bruises.

Such is briefly the narrative which in a more garbled condition was contained in Jim’s letter to Polly.

The concluding sentence of the document was, perhaps, its most important. It ran thus—

‘And now that I have finally broken with that old madman, Westaway, I must look elsewhere for the money. To an energetic

man like myself, with a thorough knowledge of horse-racing, and rare facilities for picking up stable information, there ought to be a little gold mine in this game of private tipping. If you could only find me enough to begin with — say, twenty or twenty-five pounds—I would repay you with interest on the settling day after next year's Lincoln. You know dear, I always loved you, and always will love you. It's only my cursed luck that prevents me from publicly avowing it. If you get me the money, I will make a fortune, and then you will be mine and mine only.'

Then he signed himself, with fondest love, her ardent admirer, Jim Gates—affixing by way of postscript, a whole regiment of crosses each indicating a kiss.

When Polly came to this part of the letter she kissed it; and having re-read the comforting words, she placed the precious document under her pillow and went quietly to sleep.

I suppose she dreamt of her unfortunate but gifted and faithful admirer. For, when at twelve o'clock the next day Julia came into her room with her morning chocolate, she was sleeping peacefully with a contented smile on her face.

CHAPTER VII

IN MINE INN

It was on the window of a tavern in Henley-on-Thames that Shenstone wrote those famous lines, wherein he laments, on the part of mankind in general, that no matter where one travels through 'life's dull round' he,

'May sigh to think he still has found
The warmest welcome at an inn.'

It is probable that when the ingenious Shenstone wrote the lines he was in a cynical

mood and intended to cast a reflection on the hospitalities of society. When quoted now-a-days, however, the words are used simply as conveying a compliment to the homeliness of the tavern.

I greatly fear, however, that the old Thames inn is bound to go by the board. And that if any Shenstone of the period were to write eulogistic doggerel on the plate-glass windows of the stucco palaces destined to take its place, he would speedily be arraigned before Sir Penton Hook — supposing the offence to be committed in that worthy magistrate's division.

Do you remember how well the cheese tasted, how excellent the crisp crust of the cottage loaf, how faultless the butter, how fresh the lettuce, and how superior to fabled nectar the draught of foaming beer from a tankard that shone like silver? In the stucco or red brick riparian palaces they have substituted Gorgonzola and Camembert for the old fashioned article. But you

cannot *eat* Gorgonzola or Camembert. In my time it was not unusual after a ten or twelve mile spin to make a meal of bread and the homely Cheddar.

Brown cheeked maidens, as a rule, spread the snowy damask for those repasts, and attended to the wants of young Hercules or of young Goliath of Gath, sculling perhaps in the direction of Askalon. Now big-footed waiters in dress clothes, looking singularly faded and greasy in the clear sunlight, attend to your wants greatly nervous and expectant regarding the amount of your tip.

Nor to my mind do the plate glass, the tessellated pavements and the architectural pretensions generally of the modern structures compensate for the absence of the ancient characteristics of the riparian inn. I liked the heavy oak beams that ran across the blackened roof, the wide fireplace in the parlour, the quaint oak chairs, with their high backs; the pike of many pounds, looking fierce even in death, suspended

from the wall in glass cases, and seeming for all the world as if they were swimming away at a prodigious rate. I have no insuperable objection to sawdust, and in the long clay pipe there is an artistic observance of the fitness of things.

Sometimes a few pictures hung on the walls. These were for the most part caricatures by Seymour; for as it has been found impossible to render the punt fisher heroic, he is obliged, an' he be determined to acquire illustration of his pastime, to put up with such pictorial ribaldries. After a good day's work on the river, how delightful it is to sit in the subdued light of such a parlour, and listen without the slightest impatience, but rather with a tolerance that amounts almost to interest, to the lying legends that flow in a bubbling stream from the mouths of the local fishermen.

It is impossible to say whether Capel Landor coincided with me in my views

with regard to river-side inns; and as he makes but one appearance in these pages, it is not perhaps essential to canvass his opinion. It is certain, however, that he drove Miss Parsons on the Sunday, not to the 'Star and Garter,' at Richmond, where probably that lady might have preferred to dine, but to the 'Swan,' at Ditton, a more old-fashioned hostelry; and he selected this caravansary, he explained because, at that time of year, it was very quiet, and because the landlord could be depended on to produce a reliable bottle of wine.

Capel Landor was a handsome but somewhat hard-mouthed man of about forty. He had held a commission in the army, and was known about town as Captain Landor. Without being anything of a dandy, he had acquired the reputation of being the best dressed man about town. On the lawn at Goodwood, or the enclosure at Sandown, Landor's figure was sure to command attention. And yet his reputation in society was

by no means equal to his popularity in his own particular sets. He suffered indeed from—

‘That eternal want of pence
Which vexes public men.’

He had, it is true, excellent chambers in St James’ Street, kept a brougham and a park-hack, and managed to pay his club subscriptions. But he was chronically pressed for ready-money, and made weekly excursions into the city to interview Shadrach of Throgmorton Street, or Messrs Meshach and Abednego of Copthal Court. These adventures in the far East were playfully alluded to as ‘hunting the Snark.’ And it must be confessed that having been once hunted by the Captain, the Snark was wont to become uncommonly shy.

Occasionally, it would happen that Landor would ‘pull off’ some forty-to-one chance on a race course. At such times, if he managed to get out of the ring without solicitation on

the part of book-makers, to whom he happened to be indebted he would disburse his money right royally--giving entertainments to his friends, at which the merry games of *ecarté* and even poker, were prosecuted till the glowing sky was touched by

‘Rosy finger’d Dawn, the Goddess of the morning.’

Nay, after such windfalls he has been known to pay his tailor ten pounds on account, and to promise an early remittance to his bootmaker.

Audacious but refined, brilliant without vulgarity, perfectly unscrupulous, and yet perfectly ‘good form,’ Landor was just the sort of man to gain an ascendancy over a slow intellect, like that of Rugby. And when Rugby discovered that Landor was a person, who might be made use of, their acquaintance ripened into a friendship which was of mutual advantage. Lord Rugby sometimes wanted advice and assistance; while Landor always wanted money.

During dinner, Landor had talked much and with accustomed liveliness. But the dinner had been dull. Their table had been brought up close to a window that looked on to the gray and melancholy surface of the backwater. The wooden swan, in carved effigy, seemed sad and lonely, perched above the steps leading to the landing stage. Gone were the house-boats, that, during the season, were moored opposite the hostelry windows. Nor was there sight or sound of boating men to be encountered. Even the laugh of the genial host caught at intervals, was subdued and soft.

But the dulness of the dinner was not chiefly attributable to the wintry appearance of the surroundings. With that instinct, which never fails to warn a woman, Miss Parsons had guessed, early in the day, that her interview with Landor boded ill. Nor could she dispel the feeling. In vain, he told his choicest anecdotes, or flattered her vanity,

by affecting to consult her in the selection of wines.

In the middle of dessert, an awkward silence had fallen on the twain in the empty room. Baby shivered, and then swallowed a glass of Port to counteract the chilly feeling that was crawling over her. Landor passed his cigarette case, and, when both tiny rolls were alight, asked with assumed carelessness—

‘Can you guess why I brought you down here?’

‘To stand me a dinner, of course.’

‘Ever so much more serious than that.’

‘I don’t understand you?’

‘You shall. Baby! I am hopelessly in love with you. Rugby is unworthy of you. Fly with me.’

Landor was by no means a bad actor, but Miss Parsons knew that the ring of his voice was not true. His protestations were insincere.

‘You profess to be Lord Rugby’s friend,’

she replied, 'and I am ashamed of you for suggesting such a thing.'

'My angel,' he answered, with simulated earnestness, 'a passion like mine rises superior to all friendships. Give me hope.'

'I give you no hope. I hate you for this, and I shall certainly tell Lord Rugby.'

Landor leaned back in his chair, blew out a circling cloud of blue smoke, and replied in a sad regretful tone—

'You may spare yourself the trouble. *I* will describe the interview to his lordship.'

'You !'

'Yes, why not? In fact, my dear, as you say on the stage, we are dissembling. Lord Rugby knew of the proposition I have made to you. He is a soft-hearted, not to say slow-witted nobleman, and imagined that his easiest way out of the entanglement would be through me.'

'You are telling falsehoods,' cried Miss Parsons, reddening to the roots of her hair.

'Pardon me, madam, I never lie unless it

is absolutely necessary. In the present case the truth is easiest and best.'

His cool calculating manner frightened her. Her rage died away, and she asked anxiously, and with a certain touch of humility in her tone,

'Has—has Rugby grown tired of me?'

'I should not be so ungallant as to imagine such a thing possible. But he has grown very tired indeed of a gentleman friend of yours.'

Miss Parsons breathed hard.

'In fact he entertains towards that person the same unreasoning sentiment which Othello felt towards Cassio.'

'But I always told him about Jim—and he knew that he was an acquaintance of mine.'

'Your candour in making the confession was noble, but to my thinking indiscreet. It did not, however, require any assurance of yours. His lordship has become possessed of letters of yours to your young friend.'

She looked now grievously alarmed.

‘Letters of mine to Jim! Where did he get them?’

‘Don’t know, I’m sure. Bought ’em of your friend Jim, most likely.’

‘It’s a lie,’ said Polly, firmly—at the same time grasping a silver dessert knife with a viciousness that made her companion smile.

‘That is the second time that you have accused me of a very terrible vice. I have a delicate business to perform and I wish to do it with as little violence as possible to your very natural feelings.’

‘Go on, sir.’

‘Well, the letters are compromising beyond redemption. You have chosen the Cad. You must release the Gentleman.’

Her bosom was heaving—she drew her breath quickly. But otherwise she retained the mastery of herself. Landor proceeded.

‘Lord Rugby has taken the liberty of presuming that this person is one whose

social position will not prove a barrier to a matrimonial alliance with you.'

She felt now that all was over between herself and her protector. She listened in a dull stupid way as Landor calmly went on.

'And although you haven't the slightest claim in the world on my friend Rugby, he wishes through me to offer you the contents of your house and a cheque for two hundred pounds, with his best wishes for your future welfare.'

'I shall see Lord Rugby.'

'You will never see him again — by *his* wish. His lawyer will call on you to-morrow. Be advised by me, and accept his offer ; and now, perhaps we had better order the brougham, and return to town.'

She rose from the table ; and, placing her hand upon it, she gazed at Lord Rugby's friend with flashing eyes.

'Go back in the same carriage with *you* ? Never ! I shall go by train. I shall walk.'

‘That would be reckless, not to say ridiculous,’ he remarked, quietly.

She did not seem to notice his sneer; but she went on with increasing ardour—

‘Listen to me. I’m a poor girl, and—God help me!—I’ve been a bad girl. But I’ve been true to Lord Rugby; and whatever I am, I don’t count myself so low as you. You who fetch and carry for a peer, and do his dirty work. You who are more his servant than his valet because he pays you more.’ . . .

‘I am afraid that your observations are not calculated to interest me. Permit me, madam, to take my leave.’

‘Wait! Tell Lord Rugby that I did love Jim, and that I always will love him. Thank him for his kindness. For he was always considerate and good, and incapable of doing work which he pays broken-down gentlemen to perform. Tell him’—

But Landor had left the room, and Polly sat down, and falling forward with her head on her hands, wept bitterly.

CHAPTER VIII

OUR FUTURE MEMBER

SIR PENTON'S address fluttered on all the dead walls in Wapshot. For his influence was paramount there. And, indeed, had that not been so Wapshot was naturally a Conservative little place, believing in landlords, and providence, in foreign wars, and in all other institutions connected with the national progress.

Sir Penton's address was somewhat less patronising in tone and pompous in expression than most of his public utterances. This cir-

cumstance was attributable to the fact that his agent, a London lawyer of immense experience had toned the original manifesto down, and so, for the first time in his life the worthy baronet was made to appear asking a favour from his fellow creatures. Had Sir Penton's appeal been confined to the village alone, no agent in the world could ever have induced him to abate by one iota the offensive tone of the original draft. But Wapshot was only one very small part of a very large county.

When the address of Mr Davis—a man who grew hops in Kent, and whose only claim to the representation of another county, was that he had lived all his life in it—was posted beside that of the local magnate, public feeling in Wapshot ran high, and people asked what in the name of wonder would happen next? The fall of the sky probably and the consequent catching of larks. The Conservatism of Wapshot was of a practical kind, and the bills of the Liberal candidate were promptly torn down or defaced.

The next day, however, every wall in the village and every barn door in the vicinity was covered with the obnoxious placards, while the address of Sir Penton had disappeared altogether, being in all instances pasted over with the Liberal proposals of the Intruder. It may be mentioned that at this time there was a great smell of paste observed issuing from Molt's wooden residence, and that the extraordinary man himself had been encountered at four on the very morning of the outrage, limping painfully in the direction of his home with a paste pot in the one hand and a bill sticker's brush in the other. No doubt he had been endeavouring to give some practical return for the great political benefits received at the hands of 'Brutus' and the 'Serf.'

Mr Parsons alone of the public men of Wapshot was of wide, tolerant, and impartial views. He permitted both bills to appear side by side on his premises. He was a man wise in his generation and had come to the conclusion

that a Conservative shilling is worth a dozen pence, and that a Radical coin of the same denomination is not worth a farthing more. He numbered some of both parties among his customers, and in politics as in beer he catered for both. So long as they brought their money to him it mattered not a straw to whom they took their votes.

Notwithstanding the repeated assurances of his agent, Sir Penton himself was not quite happy about the election. He hated the idea of a personal canvas and thought that the humiliation of going through one might be postponed, at all events, to the eve of the election. But the agent urged the personal efforts being put forth by Mr Davis.

‘Hang Mr Davis,’ replied the baronet, testily.

‘Certainly, Sir Penton,’ said the agent, ‘hang him if you like. But I would rather suggest your following his brilliant example. It will dispose of him quite as effectually.’

‘There is to me something absolutely re-

pulsive in the idea of calling on a lot of scoundrelly shop-keepers and cringing to them.'

'I can easily understand that to a gentleman of your position, fortune, and high feeling, the operation must appear somewhat degrading. But it is absolutely essential.'

Sir Penton frowned.

'Regard it as a nasty dose of medicine and swallow it, making as little of a wry face as possible.'

This conversation took place in Sir Penton's study, and in the presence of Lady Hook.

'And may I suggest that in these as in all other matters the power of the ladies is simply ee-normous. I am sure, Lady Hook, that in this village and the surrounding district we may count upon your assistance.'

'I am sure that I would do anything in my power. But really I understand so little of politics, and I'm so much afraid of going into the houses of the farmers—

there is invariably something of a catching kind wrong with the baby, or'——

'I trust,' interposed Sir Penton, with returning pomposity, 'that you will not consider it necessary in any way to inconvenience Lady Hook.'

There was a perceptible sneer in the words. That sneer meant not that her ladyship was making an unnecessary fuss about the request that had been suggested to her, but that in the baronet's private opinion his wife did not possess sufficient intelligence to prosecute any mission of the kind.

'Nonsense, my dear Lady Hook,' said the agent, warmly. 'We can't possibly get along without *you*. And may I ask whether there are other members of the family?'

'There is my son,' quickly replied the mother, a faint blush suffusing her face.

'He is, however, not available,' answered the baronet, curtly. 'He is in London prosecuting his studies.'

‘May I ask for which of the professions he is destined?’ asked the agent.

‘The law.’

‘My own calling.’

‘I should have said,’ observed Sir Penton, in that calm offensive tone of which he was a master, ‘that my son will adopt the higher branch of the profession. He is reading for the Bar.’

‘Exactly so,’ replied the other, affecting not to have seen the sneer. ‘And he is clever, of course?’

Lady Hook did not wait for her husband to answer that inquiry.

‘He is wonderfully clever,’ she replied, with the eager enthusiasm of a mother; ‘but I will just show you what the *Times* says about him.’

Sir Penton turned sharply on his wife—

‘I have to request, Lady Hook, that you will do nothing of the sort.’ Then turning to the man of law and elections—‘In his moments of leisure my son has amused

himself by writing some trifle or other—and the newspaper fellows have spoken kindly of it.’

‘I have no doubt he is popular about here?’ said the agent inquiringly.

‘They *adore* him,’ answered Lady Hook, with emotion. ‘It is impossible not to love him. In fact’—

‘Madam!’ exclaimed Sir Penton, raising his voice ever so slightly, ‘enough has, I think, been said in favour of your paragon.’

‘I am sure I shall have great pleasure in making the young gentleman’s acquaintance.’

‘I am confident that the pleasure will be mutual,’ replied the baronet, coldly, and as if he were confident that the agent and his son would loathe each other with the greatest intensity.

‘He must, I think, be spared presently from his law studies,’ went on the agent, ‘we shall want his assistance. Now I must take my leave. I want to sound Mr Gilliat—and at the same time I shall be able to find out

where all the sick babies are, so that Lady Hook may know her line of country when she sets out on her political mission.'

'I beg sir, that while sounding Mr Gilliat, you will ask no favour of him for me.'

'All that, my dear Sir Penton, you must leave to me. And as to asking a favour, I shall most certainly ask any influential Conservative I may encounter to support the Conservative candidate; and this gentleman commands more votes than might be imagined.'

'You will no doubt do as you think best. But I have once more to say that I should be annoyed — seriously annoyed — if any favour for me were solicited at the hands of Mr Gilliat.'

'Rely on our discretion,' answered the man from London. 'And now I must be off. Good-day, Lady Hook. Good-day, Sir Penton and—and good luck.'

When he had gone Lady Hook lay back in her chair, heaved a gentle sigh and closed

her eyes. The opportunity of praising her boy to a perfect stranger had been infinitely gratifying to her. She would probably sleep and dream of her darling. Her intentions in this respect—if indeed she had any such intentions—were frustrated. Sir Penton's metallic voice broke in on her reveries.

‘A pompous pretentious presuming fellow,’ said Sir Penton—alluding, no doubt, to the departed guest.

‘An odious person,’ acquiesced Lady Hook.

Now, although Lady Hook would occasionally venture to express an opinion in the presence of a third party, she understood her marital duties too well ever to express a decided one when alone with her husband. And to do that man every justice he very seldom appealed to Lady Hook for an opinion on any subject of moment.

‘With all his bumptiousness he is shrewd—and practical.’

‘Extremely,’ yawned her ladyship.

‘I trust, madam, the discussion of matters connected with my candidature does not bore you?’

‘On the contrary, Sir Penton, it interests me above all things.’

A dry cough from Sir Penton was intended probably to intimate scepticism.

‘He seemed to make a point of having Richard’s assistance.’

For the first time there were emphasis and expression in her reply.

‘Yes, indeed, Penton. He seemed to make a *great* point of that. And I think he was right—that is to say, don’t *you* think he was right?’

‘I am not prepared to endorse his view with regard to the importance of Richard’s assistance. That I believe to be all moonshine. But if his presence will relieve you of any active participation in the canvass, I am willing to send for him.’

‘Oh, thank you, Penton. You are so

good, so considerate. Shall I write to Dick at once ?'

'Upon my word, Lady Hook, one would think you were about to stand for the county yourself. *I will communicate with my son.*'

Lady Hook lay back again among her cushions with a much happier expression on her face. She was saying to herself something of this sort—

'I am sure I always thought elections horrid. But I shall never think so again. Fancy Dick being brought home by an election. And I can't imagine why Sir Penton should consider the agent gentleman vulgar. To my mind he is a very superior person, and I feel certain that he is an unexceptionable husband and father. And the quickness with which he saw how essential it was to send for Dick, shows him to be a person of more than ordinary intelligence.'

It would not have at all interfered with Lady Hook's exalted opinion of the agent gentleman and his unimpeachable position

with regard to the domestic relations, had she been informed—as indeed the fact was—that the agent gentleman was an incorrigible bachelor of many years' standing. She endowed him with all the virtues. For was he not the good angel who had insisted on the absolute necessity for her poor prodigal's return to his home; though she had little hope that the master of the house would kill a fatted calf in honour of the event, or indeed indulge in any other demonstration unbecoming to his position as a magistrate and magnate of the county.

There was a pause in the conversation. Sir Penton had been gazing impassively at a wonderful portrait of the first baronet growing indistinct in the fading light of a November afternoon. From his sharp inscrutable features one could never guess the nature of his cogitations. He was at the present moment in deep thought arguing the pros and cons of a question which would not have given a moment's pause to a man

of more catholic views. 'Presently he spoke,

'Do you recollect the name of that very remarkable person to whom my agent alluded—the gentleman of whom Lord Hampton appeared to entertain so high an opinion?'

'Mr Gilliat,' replied Lady Hook, wondering why on earth her husband should affect ignorance in the matter.

'I understand that this Mr Gilliat has founded various institutions for the welfare of the community—food both for the mind and for the body.'

'That is so,' answered her ladyship.

'It is quite impossible for me,' went on the great little man 'to appear as a supporter of a gentleman of whose religious views I do not approve.'—Sir Penton it may be mentioned had not the remotest idea as to what Gilliat's views might be—'but I request that you will send him a cheque in your own name for his soup kitchen or blanket

club or whatever other outcome his eccentric philanthropy may take.'

Lady Hook felt surprised; but she said nothing. Possibly she looked her astonishment.

'County elections,' went on Sir Penton, as though some justification for his conduct were demanded, 'resemble poverty; strange bed-fellows, you know. And you will not omit to forward the cheque?'

'If you wish it, of course not,' replied Lady Hook.

'I *do* wish it, madam,' he said, with his accustomed decision of tone.

Then, after another glance at the sharp features of his illustrious ancestor on the the wall—perhaps he sought inspiration there—he added—

'I have some writing to do. Later on I will join you in the drawing-room, and ask you for a cup of tea. O'Lympus dines with us at eight.'

The baronet rose and opened the library

door for his wife with an indescribable mincing dignity, and bowed her out of the room with great ceremony. Then he rang for lights, and sat down before his desk, complaining bitterly to himself of the levelling tendencies of modern society, the horrible necessity of entertaining inferiors involved in an election campaign, and the unspeakable inconvenience of strange bed-fellows in general.

Levelling tendencies, indeed! Entertaining inferiors, did you say? Strange bed-fellows, quotha! Why, Sir Penton, your grandfather received the baronetcy because he lent money at usurer's rates to a Royal roué.

CHAPTER IX

A FAIR CONSPIRATOR

‘FANCY that impostor “Fantail” writing a book on fishing,’ and the Rev. Mr O’Lympus held up an octavo in green binding and gold edges for the inspection of Carrie, who was engaged in conning the paragraphs in the *Morning Post*.

‘What presumption!’ exclaimed Carrie, sympathetically.

‘I admit,’ said O’Lympus, not wishing to overwhelm the presumptuous angler all at once, ‘that “Fantail” can write tolerably

well about pigeons—when he likes. But fishing ! Why, here's a chapter on Legering for Barbel. Do you know I don't believe he understands what a leger is. Give him the salmon-gut, and the gimp, and the running-line, and the lead, and I don't expect he would understand how to combine them. The way he talks about baiting a Barbel Swim is enough to bring tears to the eyes of the genuine angler.'

Two days had elapsed since our last chapter, and a persistent down-pour of rain pervaded the whole of the Thames Valley, and saturated the pastures and ploughed lands of half-a-dozen counties. The waters of the Thames at Wapshot were no longer still waters. Tributaries swollen by their own intake joined the parent stream and swelled that. The waters dashed brown and heavy above the weirs, and were gradually creeping up the banks of the stream—creeping inch by inch. Empty and melancholy was the one street of Wapshot, the

water running merrily over the pebbles in the gutters, and also making its way to join the waters of the Thames. On the fluttering placards containing Sir Penton's address to the independent electors the all embracing moisture had a pitiable effect. Those mural manifestos were saturated, and peeled off in the slightest wind, exhibiting to the student of such literature a record entirely unintelligible.

Breakfast was over at the Vicarage. The Vicar, it must be said, was less affected by the untoward atmospheric influences by reason of the presence of his niece—that erratic young lady having a few days ago taken up her abode with him. Outside the copious rain fell and dripped from the eaves, and coursed down the window panes. And the sky was black, nor was there ray, or hope of ray, from the obscured sun.

Inside the pleasant breakfast-room of the Vicarage things looked bright and cheerful

enough, and Mr O'Lympus, warming to his work, proceeded—

‘A barbel, I can assure you, is most capricious in his feeding; and, really, an author should know him and his habits thoroughly before he undertakes to write a great green and gold book about him.’

It did not occur to the good easy man that he himself not unfrequently wrote and preached about subjects, of the significance of which, as he admitted to himself, he had but a dim apprehension. Something of this kind possibly crossed Carrie’s mind as she turned the conversation to topics of more immediate interest to herself.

‘Do you remember, two summers ago, uncle dear, that I complained that my guardian in taking me away from Wapshot, was taking me away from a drama, the serious interest of which was just about to commence?’

‘Yes, perfectly; and the chief actors in the comedy were our young friends Dick

and Miss Gilliat, whose disappearance has caused such an unpleasant feeling.'

'Miss Gilliat is with her mother—where she ought to be,' replied Carrie, with some temper, 'and I don't see why the Wapshoters need have any unpleasant feeling in the matter.'

The parson shook his head. As a bachelor he was inclined to fight exceedingly shy of such subjects as that which his niece was anxious to bring forward.

'Now, uncle, you really must assist us in bringing the comedy to a satisfactory conclusion. The young people love each other. Ruth's mother approves of the match. When Dick has had time to talk dear Lady Hook over, you may depend she will approve of it also.'

'My dear child, what in the world have I to do with all this—at least until they come to the altar?'

'What have you to do with it, uncle? What should any kind-hearted clergyman

have to do with it? Here is the happiness of two young people endangered by the unreasoning obstinacy of two middle-aged men—in fact I may say *old* men.'

'Well?'

'These irrational old men hold aloof — each standing on his dignity. It is evident to the meanest capacity that they should be brought together.'

Mr O'Lympus shook his head once more, and answered—

'It is a matter at their own option. You cannot *compel* men to be friends.'

'My dear uncle that sentiment is positively unchristian. Besides that is not the question. I want you to take an interest in this for *my* sake'—and she looked at him in a beautiful beseeching way that was almost irresistible. Almost but not altogether.

'I confess, Carrie,' he answered, with a kindly smile, 'that I am not—as indeed how should I be—versed in the ways of your lovely sex. But I always have understood

that matrons claim a monopoly in match-making.'

'So they do,' replied the fair sophist, 'but you see this match *is* made, so that I am assuming nobody's functions.'

'I am immovable either to your appeals or to your logic,' said the vicar.

'Then you are the wicked uncle of the old nursery book, bent on destroying my two babes in the wood,' exclaimed the girl, but with so much good humour in her accent that the reverend man could not feel annoyed.

'You know that Dick is coming home?' she asked.

'Sir Penton told me something of the sort. The experience will do him good. One of these days I hope to see him in the House himself.'

'He would be a credit to any assembly of the kind. Judging from the excessive brilliancy, amounting in some cases to positive rudeness, of the repartee in his play, I

should say he is just the man to get up and tackle Mr Gladstone.'

'And Lord Hampton,' added O'Lympus.

'Lord Hampton, being in the Upper House, would enjoy a happy immunity from his attacks. But I have another secret to impart.'

'Yes,' said his reverence, patiently expectant.

'You must swear to keep it. Swear on "Fantail" and the Barbel Swim.'

'Carrie, Carrie!' answered the vicar, reproachfully.

'Well, well,' she answered, rising and going towards him, 'swear on *this*.'

So saying, she kissed him, and returning to her chair, said—

'Ruth's coming home, too.'

'Indeed,' said the vicar, in a tone of ordinary acquiescence which quite annoyed his niece.

'Yes. And Ruth's mother is coming.'

There was genuine surprise in the vicar's reception of this item.

‘Ruth's mother!’

‘And why not, pray?’ inquired Carrie, in triumphant tones. ‘I ask you, uncle Fitz, is not the proper place for Ruth's mother—the home of Ruth's father? Do you think that when I am married to Lord Hampton I will consent to live away from him?’

‘Certainly not,’ replied O'Lympus. ‘But that is different. Mr Gilliat is such a peculiar man, he may refuse to receive her.’

‘He is a Christian and a gentleman,’ answered Ruth, championing the absent man. ‘And he will, I think, act up to the doctrines of the one and the code of the other. As to being peculiar, I am of opinion that both he and Sir Penton are peculiarly unreasonable.’

‘The cause of the lovers is not likely to suffer while you are their advocate, my dear,’ said O'Lympus, admiringly.

‘I would do anything to serve them, and

you can see me set my heart on the accomplishment of this thing, and yet refuse to assist me.'

'My dear niece,' replied the excellent fellow, 'even supposing that I had graver reasons for refusing to assist in a matter of this kind, I assure you that my interference would very likely frustrate all your pretty designs. I am a rare bungler, Carrie.'

'You are a dear, good uncle, and I am a wicked niece to worry you.'

O'Lympus left the room to look out a suitable sermon for the morrow. When he got to the study, he gazed regretfully at his hunting-boots, standing erect and shining on their trees; glanced at his guns and fishing tackle, and then muttered to himself, with suppressed indignation—

'The idea of "Fantail" publishing anything about legering for barbel. I declare I never heard of anything half so presumptuous!'

CHAPTER X

'I HAVE COME HOME!'

NOTWITHSTANDING the moist and depressing state of the weather Hoppy's political ardour was at fever heat, his political hopes were high, and his political activity at once harrassing to the enemy, and embarrassing to his friends. He threw himself with the utmost eagerness into the fray, quite unmindful of the fact that the real struggle was yet to come, and that it would be judicious to husband his resources for the day of battle.

He had raised the banner of ‘Serf’ and ‘Brutus.’ He was the missionary of political emancipation. And it probably did not lessen his enthusiasm to know that every blow struck for freedom was struck *at* his old opponent—the Chairman of the County Bench. It is quite wonderful the zest which strong personal animosity gives to a political struggle.

Being but a recent recruit in the noble army of politicians—a very babe in his political long clothes—it is not surprising that Hoppy should have been indiscreet in the propagation of his gospel. His methods were not those recognised by the majority of political agents, and he would, with the utmost cheerfulness, commit acts calculated to bring him within the purview of the law. The infatuated man had a firm faith in the famous axiom of Sir Robert Walpole. He not only believed that ‘all men have their price,’ but he was confident

that they might be bought in the open market—like pigs.

This latter supposition had occasioned disagreeable consequences. Proceeding to a town of greater importance than Wapshot, Hoppy had gone among the politicians of the place. He purchased drinks for them at the various hotels, disseminated with terse eloquence the doctrines of 'Brutus,' and exhibiting a handful of sovereigns dwelt on the beauties of freedom and independence, and frankly offered to purchase their votes.

A man of Hoppy's earnestness and eccentricity, possessed of a considerable sum of money in specie, was sure to acquire, in a very short space of time, a large number of political allies. Indeed, the electors swarmed round him and fastened on him like bees, drinking in his beer and his doctrines like impartial toppers and independent electors as they were.

The weak point of this system of canvassing became shortly apparent. Hoppy was

obliged to keep pace with his following in the matter of drink; and as fresh recruits were always joining his ranks, he imbibed great quantities of malt liquor. At first he became elevated with his potations, and grew strangely eloquent and profoundly unintelligible. Then he succumbed altogether, and awoke the next morning in the tap-room of a low beer-house, the proud possessor of half-a-crown, which was all that remained out of fifty pounds which he had conveyed thither, with the fond hope of buying disciples to the eternal principles of Right against Might, and of obtaining some votes for Davis, the Radical grower of hops.

He had a splitting headache, the result of too much drink, and a night spent upon a hard floor; but the spirit of the philosopher was strong within him. He examined all his pockets to see if haply there remained of his money a single golden piece. The search was fruitless. Then he rose from the bench on which he had been sitting, and contem-

plating the half-crown piece in his hand, said, in a tone of resignation—

‘’Alf-a-tush! Well, ’alf-a-loaf, they say, is better’n no bread; an’ ’alf-a-tush, I reckon, is better’n no money. Here, lan’lord.’

He paid his humble score, performed his ablutions in the back yard under the pump, and as he trudged through the mud and mist in the direction of Wapshot mused,

‘P’raps the quids ain’t throw’d away, arter all. P’raps the boys will wote orright. Mebbe it’s like that there bread thrown upon the waters, as Miss Ruth used to speak about.’

As he recalled her name, and with it her image, he heaved an involuntary sigh, and added—

‘Poor Miss Ruth.’

Surely no man of his rank ever before took the loss of fifty pounds with such equanimity.

Of course, the episode got rumoured abroad, and poor Hoppy was made the subject of

much agreeable banter in the Conservative paper. Mr Gilliat hearing of the incident became suddenly alive to the fact that of late weeks he had been neglecting Hoppy. He had been the especial object of his daughter's care. Since, however, he had delivered the letter from London, Mr Molt had studiously avoided the Priory. He dreaded cross-examination with regard to his town excursion.

And now, thought Mr Gilliat, he may have altogether lapsed into the ways of heathendom. If rumour were to be relied on, Ruth's favourite pupil had been roaming abroad rather more drunk than Chloe, adding to that crime those equally heinous ones of bribery and corruption. Men of the Gilliat type are apt to suffer from a morbid consciousness of duties unperformed. And in the midst of his trouble and suspense he determined to go in search of the lost sheep. He would go into the highways and hedges and compel him to come in.

In that same study where Hoppy had on many a happy afternoon painfully searched the Scriptures, he stood now with abashed countenance his eyes seeking the floor. He had been bidden by the master and he had come. But compliance with the command had severely tested his courage. He would with twenty times more complacency have walked up to the mouth of a loaded cannon.

Outside the rain still fell dismally. The flower beds seemed to steam. The laurel bushes at the end of the garden were funereal growths. The branches of the plum tree stretching along the wall were like some gigantic web, and the wall itself was stained in pitiable patches by the steady fall.

A glance at Mr Gilliat showed how pain and suspense were affecting him. The thin gray hair had become more thin, more gray. His cheeks were sunken and his mouth drawn at the corners. But the fire that shone from his sunken eye spoke of a sort of glory in suffering. He was enduring tribulation.

‘Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth.’ He hugged that comfortable assurance to himself, and bore his pain in silence and without repining.

As Hoppy stole a glance at that pale pained face he felt little better than a criminal—for, was it not he who had assisted in Ruth’s flight? Was it not he who had afforded her support both moral and material? When Mr Molt had received the evangelist’s command—for such indeed he deemed it—to present himself at the Priory, his only thought was that the master wished to cross-examine him concerning Ruth’s proceedings in London on the day he had accompanied her. And this doughty advocate of the rights of man, who would have without flinching faced the bench of magistrates, trembled as he stood before Mr Gilliat. One thing he was determined on. If pressed about any visit other than to Kensington he would lie till he was black in the face.

Mr Gilliat desired his damp and distressed visitor to be seated. Hoppy chose a chair close beside the door and seated himself on the outer edge of it—giving a glance half-scared and half-propitiatory at the dread inquisitor—Mr Gilliat opened the charge in that sweet sad voice of his—

‘I am grieved—more than grieved—Molt, to hear of your proceedings at Blisston the other night.’

Hoppy plucked up courage. This was not the charge he had expected to meet.

‘I on’y ’ad a couple o’ pints o’ ale, sir.’

‘Drunkenness used not to be a failing of yours,’ went on Mr Gilliat, unheeding Hoppy’s explanation. ‘I should be very sorry to hear of you giving way to the most degrading of all the vices.’

‘I’ll never touch another drop, Swulp’—

He pulled himself up in time.

‘Make no rash resolutions, my man. If you are assured that the temptation to drink is an irresistible one ponder the matter well,

and if, after calm reflection, you believe you can keep the pledge, take it by all means.’

Hoppy, who had regretted his rash resolution almost as soon as it was uttered, felt sensibly relieved by this very common-sense suggestion, adopting it immediately and emphatically.

‘Werry good, sir. I’ll ponder over it an’ let you know.’

‘It seems so strange, so lamentable that you should in a weak moment forget all that you have been taught in this room.’

‘By Miss Ruth, God bless her!’ said Hoppy, involuntarily. ‘Ave you ’eard from ’er, sir, an’ is she quite well?’

‘I have heard from her, and she is quite well,’ replied Mr Gilliat, in a hard tone—a tone that Hoppy well guessed forbad further dalliance with the topic.

‘I was also grieved to hear that before you were overcome by drink you were engaged in committing an offence which might be followed by serious consequences.’

Hoppy shook his head vigorously in total denial of that proposition.

‘Not as I knows on,’ he replied, with the gravity of a judge.

How the presence of this man recalled to John Gilliat another presence! How he longed to retain this one on account of its associations with that other. And how his heart softened towards and went out to the lost one.

‘Yes, Hoppy, I have heard all about it. You may have sinned in ignorance. But in attempting to bribe your fellow citizens you were committing a punishable offence.’

‘Lord, Mawster, you don’t say so,’ replied the unabashed politician.

‘I *do*. And I must say, Molt, that, for a man who does not enjoy the franchise, you seem to take a very deep interest in party politics.’

‘That’s jest w’ere it is,’ replied Hoppy. ‘I’m workin’ in ’opes. My paper says the humblest may ’elp. An’ if we gets in a free-

man made in God's image, who knows but them as lives in caravans may have their rights same as them as live in palaces.'

The ghost of a smile flickered on John Gilliat's lips—flickered and went out ere the keenest eye could detect it—

'Do not misunderstand me, Mr Molt. I have no wish to influence your political opinions, so long as they are consistent with religion and common honesty. The composition of the House of Commons has but a slight interest for me now. But I am interested in candidates for that House of many mansions which is being prepared for the Father's children.'

Hoppy sighed. He would much rather discuss the burning party questions of the hour than the tame and mysterious subject which, he thought, would now be broached. Mr Gilliat went on—

'When we all appear before the last great judgment seat it will not be asked whether you are Whig or Tory, Conservative or

Communist. We will have to give an account of the deeds done in the body. And neither drunkards nor dishonest persons will pass that dread ordeal.'

Hoppy was silent. The inebriety he could not gainsay. But he considered it hard that his financial operations on behalf of freedom should be misconstrued as dishonesty.

Mr Gilliat rose, and opening a drawer in his writing table, produced a photograph. Holding the card-board in his hand, and gazing at the picture portrayed there, he said—

'When next you are tempted to do wrong, Hoppy, think of the grief that a knowledge of your guilt would give one who loved you, and whom, I think, you loved and respected.'

He paused, still gazing on the portrait, and took up the parable once more.

'She herself may not have been perfect, but her love for you was a beautiful devotion, and her teaching was founded on infallible sources. I will give you her likeness. Keep

it by you. When you do wrong recall her sweet reproaches, her'——

At this point John Gilliat handed the *carte-de-visite* to Hoppy, and turned away to hide his emotion.

Ah! John Gilliat, in that gift to an erring Christian of a picture of his patron saint was there not some acknowledgment of those papistical practices which thy soul abhorred?

Hoppy eagerly snatched the proffered card, and recognising the features of Ruth, reverently kissed its surface. He thrust it into his pocket, fearing lest Mr Gilliat should reconsider the matter, and recall the gift. And strange to say this abandoned wretch was observed to draw the sleeve of his velvet coat across his eyes. It was to spare himself the shame of feeling two big tears course down his brown and furrowed cheeks. They were the first tears that Walter Molt had shed since, as a child, he had cried for lack of food, or for large excess of blows.

There was the sound of wheels coming

up the street and stopping at the front door of the Priory. Then came a timid knock at the door. This was followed, at an interval, by a scream—evidently from Martha—stifled in its birth. There was the buzz of whispering. Footsteps approached the study door.

Mr Gilliat started. It was not Miss Dunlop who came thus. She arrived in the whirlwind and departed on the storm. A deadly pallor overspread his face. He rose, and the hand that he placed on the table trembled.

The door opened. A lady, attired plainly, but with infinite taste, entered. Behind her followed Ruth. The first lady, passing Hoppy, who was, indeed, hidden by the open door, extended her hand, and said, in a soft, winning voice—

‘John, I have come home.’

He slowly raised his trembling hand, and pointed to the door, as he had once indicated it for the benefit of Sir Penton.

May John Gilliat’s good angel attend him

now! Evil genius, in whatever guise thou comest, avaunt!

The struggle is over—the good angel has overcome. His extended arm drops to his side. The hard, stern expression dies from his face. The light of love shines in his eyes; he stretches out his arms towards her.

Ruth and Hoppy silently withdraw, and the door is closed.

CHAPTER XI

THE PALATIAL : LATE EASTON'S

IN a series of letters, addressed to the Middlesex magistrates, which appeared in the *Earwig*, Dumps had dealt very severely with the London music halls. In that famous series he had not, you may be sure, spared the management of the Palatial, formerly known as Easton's Music Hall. As a dramatic author, the opinions of Mr Dumps on music halls could scarcely be regarded as unprejudiced. And although the series commanded

general attention by reason of the graphic force of the descriptions and the indisputable reason of the comments, music halls in general, and the Palatial, late Easton's, in particular, continued to flourish amazingly.

To these letters Mr Pepper had replied in a long and luminous article in the *Contemplative Review*. Pepper's article was entitled, 'Moral Sewage,' and he had in a somewhat cynical spirit argued the absolute necessity for such establishments as the Palatial. He compared them to sewers whereby the evil humours of society were carried off, and he pictured the very deplorable results to the body politic, if these ducts for moral sewage were to be closed. On this part of the subject he waxed dull and statistical. He showed by shameful facts and abundant figures that the result of parliamentary and magisterial interference with certain establishments, to which, perhaps, one would not invite a lady's boarding school, was to spread the sewage. The area

of vice, he argued, was widened and its victims were increased.

As for myself, I have nothing of importance to add. Dumps and Pepper are able men in their way. On this matter, you observe, they are diametrically opposed. Perhaps I shall best discharge my conscience by admitting that there is much to be said on both sides of the question. I am inclined to take things as I find them. I do not wish to pose as a philosopher. But it is equally certain that I am neither a philanthropist nor a reformer.

Although Dumps regarded Music Halls as places that should be annihilated, and although Pepper would merely tolerate them as a species of social cesspool, both gentlemen occasionally visited such institutions, taking their chance as to the moral miasma to be inhaled there. At the Palatial especially, they were received by the manager with every mark of consideration—including cigars and the frisky brands of Epernay. Mr

Plumberg, the lessee of the house, was a man who bore no malice. He knew that the journalistic pen which yesterday dropped vitriol, might to-morrow exude honey. So when these men of light and leading condescended to visit his show, he flattered them without ceasing, gave them the biggest box at his disposal, and lavished on them his choicest cigars and the best that was in his cellar.

When the great M'Chantry was announced to sing a new song, the rush to the Palatial: late Easton's, was enormous. For the great M'Chantry being at the head of all the comiques, and besides being a man of strong political sentiments, which he propagated in song, added but one or two lyrics to his repertoire in the course of twelve revolving moons.

It was on one of these occasions that Dumps and Pepper and our friend D'Arcy Magee were conducted by the affable Plumberg himself to a stage box, from which they could—so very much of a stage box was

it—converse, quite unobserved, with the performers. *Jupiter Tonans*—the great organ with which Magee was connected—took no critical cognizance of establishments of the Palatial kind. But M'Chantry's new song was written by Mr Brown, and Magee was willing to do that eminent *litterateur* a turn if he should see his way to it.

Ten o'clock was the hour when these three remarkable men took their seats and gazed round the crowded house. The boxes which ran in a row round half of the building were moderately full. The balconies were crammed to suffocation, and the spaces on the floor of the building were so filled that the waiters found great difficulty in carrying refreshment to their thirsty customers. Indeed, the excellent menials frequently came into hurried collision in the narrow passages, thereby occasioning the waste of much excisable liquor, and many very forcible expletives.

'Arry was there in great force, accompanied occasionally by Mariar, but, as a

rule, attended by a choice spirit of his own sex, and greatly intent on subsequent conversation with those fair ones of the groves of Cyprus whom he beheld talking to mashers at the bar. The air was heavily laden with tobacco smoke, and the fumes of alcohol, mixed with hot water, impregnated the atmosphere. An agreeable buzz of conversation was kept up whether or not a performance was proceeding on the stage. Indeed, many of the selections were given in dumb show.

Round the chairman's table in front of the stage were seated the Toms and Jerrys of the period. Loose young gentlemen in every application of the word. Loose in their purse-strings, loose in their tongues, loose in their manners, and loosest of all in their morals. They were gentlemen to whom any atmosphere more refined than that of a billiard room or of a brothel would have been absolutely oppressive. This precious contingent was reinforced by the

arrival of the *Tipster* staff, headed by little Aaron. The chairman welcomed these humorists effusively, and Tom and Jerry—who considered it a great honour to be seen about with any of the *Tipster* people—pressed drink upon their acceptance, adding with characteristic looseness, ‘Have what you like, you know—a bottle of “The Boy”—or anything.’

The modern chairman is by no means the chairman of an earlier time. When Plancus was Consul the chairman in these halls of harmony was usually a frowsy old man, with what in those happy days was known as a ‘gin and fog voice.’ He was a man of Falstaffian paunch and Bardolphian nose, and was held in great awe by the junior members of the audience, whom he would not infrequently admonish by name. The chairman of to-day is a person attired in faultless evening dress, whose hyacinthine locks are the envy of the male vocalists on the stage, whose smile is perennial,

whose diamonds are large as the eggs of the pigeon, and whose manners are as Chesterfieldian as those of the master of the ceremonies at a suburban dancing-saloon.

These and many other delightful sights met the gaze of the three literary gentlemen in the stage box. On the stage itself, to which, indeed, no one seemed to be paying any particular attention, an acrobat of most repulsive appearance was engaged in tying two small boys—his own children, if any belief is to be placed in programmes—into knots, throwing them into the air when he had seemingly entangled them beyond possibility of undoing. In their aerial flight, however, they became disentangled, and descended on their feet, amid the feeble applause from the few who had looked on—applause so feeble that the popping of a champagne cork and the hard forced laughter of a woman were heard above it.

The repulsive acrobat, holding an infant

victim by each hand, came forward, and smiled and bowed as though the house had risen at him, and then retired to assume the more becoming garb of every-day-life. Having thus arrayed himself, he repaired to his lodgings to consume a toothsome supper of tripe and onions, and probably to ill-use the human knots out of whose distressing contortions he made his livelihood.

As this ornament of his species withdrew, Dumps remarked slyly to Pepper—

‘How do you justify that scoundrel’s existence on your moral sewage principle?’

‘Easily enough,’ answered the other. ‘If the Music Hall had not found this opening for his talents, I have no doubt he would be a burglar or an assassin.’

‘Faith, that’s nate,’ said Magee, ‘you’d have us believe that our friend, Plumberg, here, is a missionary—a saviour of society. Eh, Plumberg, me boy!’ he said, turning to that worthy, and hitting him with considerable force on the knee.

'Quite tho,' answered that gentleman, to whom the remark was unintelligible, 'capital joke, ha, ha,' and he laughed with feigned heartiness, and passed the bottle to his guests.

Further discussion on the sewage question was here stopped by the rising of the chairman, who, in a loud nasal voice, which was heard above the din, and clatter, and laughter, called out—

'La'ys and gen'l'men, Mr A. B. M'Chantry will sing the next song.'

At that intimation there arose unequivocal roars of applause; spoons were rattled against glasses, and glasses were knocked against the tables. In a word, for some minutes the greatest enthusiasm prevailed. When silence was restored, the orchestra struck up some bars of a melody founded on a waltz, and, amid another uncontrollable outburst of applause, the great M'Chantry bounded upon the stage, all smiles and shirt-front.

M'Chantry was a thick set, blonde man,

with a heavy moustache, expressive blue eyes, a very clear enunciation, and a decidedly dramatic bent. He bowed and smiled until the audience had grown tired of applauding him. Then the orchestra struck up again, and the eminent vocalist dashed away with Brown's new political song. By the time the chorus of the first stanza was at an end, the success of the new effort was assured. 'Arry and his friends had got a chorus in which they could join. The topical allusions pleased Tom and Jerry, and the staff of the *Tipster*, and all the audience agreed with the immense patriotism of the thing, and the beauty of the sentiment which made Britain the greatest among the nations

The chorus itself was not very remarkable as a literary effort. We were reminded—somewhat inaccurately, I think—that we 'had beaten the Boers.' This historic statement was made to rhyme with another about 'investing Egypt's shores,' and the whole wound up with the stirring refrain—

'For Britain is cock of the walk, my boys,
Great Britain's still cock of the walk.'

Leading politicians came in for severe reprimand or for guerdon of praise, the audience dividing on these points, and endeavouring to shout each other hoarse. Lord Ballymacarret and his mission did not escape the shafts of the satirist. He was, indeed, held up to public execration in a couplet, one line of which ended with 'humble pie,' the other neatly following up with 'all my eye.'

'I suppose Brown takes money for writing that drivel,' observed Dumps.

'Faith,' replied Magee, 'we all take money for our drivel, an' small blame to us; at all events, you'll give Brown the credit of knowing what'll suit his audience. D'ye think Jean Inglelow, or Austin Dobson could write anything that could suit 'em half as well?'

'Magee is right,' said Pepper, 'Brown is very good at helping to build a sewer. He does not profess to erect cathedrals;

but I take it that it is better to succeed at a moderate undertaking than to fail in a great one.'

Dumps, however, was determined to find fault, particularly now that the genial Plumberg had withdrawn with profuse expressions of apology for an absence all three ardently desired. He abandoned the bard, therefore, and fell upon the vocalist.

M'Chantry had sung more verses, had answered recalls, had bowed and smiled upon his patrons, and still they demanded his presence, whereupon he made a little speech, in which he declared that it would give him unspeakable delight to sing his great patriotic song all over again for them, but that he was obliged to rush away to repeat the ditty for the benefit of an audience at the other end of the town.

'Upon my word,' said Dumps, in a tone of considerable personal annoyance, 'I believe that fellow has sung himself into the belief that he is a political power.'

‘And he is a power,’ said Magee, quietly.

Dumps looked at him in amazement. But Magee was evidently in earnest. So he merely retorted—

‘For heaven’s sake don’t quote Andrew Fletcher, of Saltoun. Macaulay has used him up.’

‘I’m going to quote nobody but meself. An’ I tell you when you have as much knowledge of elections as I have you’ll know more about the infloonce of M’Chantry and his drivel, as you call it, than you do now.

Pepper’s *lorgnette* was directed on the opposite box.

‘Surely that’s Baby Parsons?’ he said to his companions.

‘Devil a wan else,’ replied Magee.

‘But that’s not Lord Rugby?’ continued Pepper, who had the curiosity of a woman.

‘No. That’s his successor. Havn’t you heard? Lord Rugby is aff wid the old love. His place was sold up yesterday, and knowin’ his lordship to be a great judge of Irish

whisky, I bought up every bottle there was of it for about ten shillins a gallon. Durt chape it was too.'

'And who is this—this gentleman?' went on Mr Pepper.

'His name is Gates. Bedad, he claims to be one of us—for at wan payriod he wrote for the *Tipster*.'

Dumps and Pepper shuddered at the mention of that outrageous sheet.

'I hear they're going to be marrid—them two. Case of natural selection. Those gyurls are all the same. I was in love wid wan of them meself, only she ran aff wid an Eye-talian, that afther hawkin bills in front of the 'op'ra house, became a waither in a restaurant in Soho. Then he got to be a tenor, said he was a prince in disguise, made aff wid her, and when he had pawned all she had in the world abandoned her to her fate.'

'A wonderfully interesting and romantic

narrative,' said Mr Dumps, not without a suspicion of sarcasm in his tone.

'An' quite thrue, I assure ye,' replied the Irishman cordially.

The occupants of the box opposite were clearly unconscious of Pepper's scrutiny.

'By Jove!' exclaimed Pepper, 'she's given him a roll of notes. Now he's counting them over. See how his cad's countenance beams. They're all right I suppose, for he's put them in his breast pocket. Proceeds of the sale I suppose.'

'Dunno, I'm sure. Shouldn't think, however, that Lord Rugby's the sort of man to leave her totally unprovided for.'

When these three gentlemen passed through the saloon on their way to the means of exit, Jim and Polly were standing at the bar discussing a pint of 'Mumm.'

'Good-night, Baby,' said Magee as he passed.

'Good-night, dear,' responded that young

woman, without thereby, at all ruffling the feelings of her consort.

‘It was in a different tone that she addressed another gentleman who was sauntering past without any wish to attract her attention. She touched him on the shoulder. He turned—

‘Captain Landor, I want to introduce you to my future husband.’

‘The captain gazed up and down at Jim without displaying any emotion, made the slightest possible inclination of his head, and then turning to Polly observed with a languid drawl—

‘I congratulate you, I’m sure.’

‘He’s going into the country to-morrow to ask my Pa’s consent.’

‘A most admirable precaution,’ said Landor ‘but I must be going, Miss Parsons. Good-night. I wish you all sorts of luck.’ and, bowing to her without taking the slightest notice of Jim, he walked off.

‘The cur!’ exclaimed Polly, clenching her

hands, 'will no one strike him for me. How I wish I were a man !'

'*I don't,*' added Jim. The girl absolutely trembled with pleasure at the delicate compliment. The orchestra struck up 'God Save the Queen,' and the patrons of the Palatial : late Easton's, slowly departed into the dark December night.

CHAPTER XII

‘Avails thee not
To whom related or by whom begot ;
A heap of dust alone remains of thee.’

ASHEN gray was the day, and the wind whistled round the lock-keeper's house and swayed the great bare branches of the elms, and laid the long grasses level with the earth. The water had risen above the tow-path and no craft had that day passed through Wapshot lock. The keeper himself sat over the fire smoking his pipe and reading back numbers of a daily paper.

His two children stood at the latticed window looking out on the cold December landscape, the broad rush of the once still waters, and listening to the music of the tumbling weir and the melancholy sougning of the wintry wind. And they were thinking perhaps of the time of roses, when the honeysuckle grew over the front of the lock-house, and the nightingale sang in the big poplar, and ladies with beautiful faces and bright dresses passed through the battered old lock, and the air was gay with sunlight and laughter and the music of birds. It was all so different now.

All at once, however, both the children uttered an exclamation of pleasure, on which their brown and pock-marked father looked up inquiringly from his paper. Before his children had time to gratify his curiosity the latch was lifted, the door opened, and Jim Gates stood within exchanging compliments with the master of the house, and patting the curly heads of his chubby fac'd boys.

Nor had he failed to bring with him apparatus to add to their stock of toys: monkeys on sticks, wonderfully mobile faces in india-rubber, and musical instruments invented to drive the most patient parent out of his mind.

‘I came by way of Wrayton,’ said Jim, in answer to a question of the lock-keeper, ‘and I shall want you perhaps to put me up to-night.’

‘Proud and happy, sir, proud and happy,’ answered the man of the lock, delighted at the chance which sent him some one with whom to converse.

How different was Jim now to the down-at-heel young man who first took his lodgings. He was a resplendent Jim; a Jim with a gold watch and chain, an overcoat of immense length and innumerable pockets, and a hat so shiny that you could see to shave yourself in it. A Jim, in fact, of the first water.

The man about town produced from one of the capacious pockets of his coat a bottle of

whisky, which he presented to his worthy host; and when the gentlemen had toasted each other after the most approved fashion, Jim said—

‘I suppose you can lend me your punt to shove across as far as Wapshot.’

‘Certainly,’ said the other. ‘Only you must take her a bit higher nor usual. There’s a bit of a fresh on, and you musn’t get too close to the weir. When d’ye want her?’

‘Now. At once!’ answered Jim, consulting his watch, which indicated half-past four. Then he stooped and kissed the children, who did not shrink from those tainted caresses. And the two men went out, defying the bluster of the afternoon. Punting I take to be the finest of aquatic arts, and the most difficult. But although Jim was not a punter, in any artistic sense of that word, he could ‘shove’ a punt, and having been admonished by his friend, the lock-keeper, he set off, keeping the head of his craft well up stream, and marvelling at the

strength of the swift brown waters. He arrived in safety on the Wapshot side, jumped ashore, and made his vessel fast.

He was a vulgar, small-souled, swaggering fellow, and his mission on this occasion was not merely to ask Parsons for the hand of his daughter, and to sound him as to the amount of dower he proposed to accord her. He also harboured a vague notion of annoying and humiliating Mark Westaway. Fired with this virtuous resolve he made straight for the Vicarage Farm, and striding up the bare wet path between the melancholy lines of the leafless rose trees, he knocked boldly at the door.

Mark had for some days been in a moping melancholy state, wandering from room to room, talking to himself, and appearing at times quite light-headed. The two women, to whom he had always been a tyrant, watched over him, prepared dainty dishes for his consumption, and probably prayed for him. He was a prodigal father, and he had come home.

He had not, it is true, come home much; but he came home more than usual. And then, he was becoming so weak in body, so wandering in mind that the hearts of these two ill-used women went out towards the selfish old reprobate.

Under these circumstances, it was with misgiving and dismay that Kate saw Jim, well dressed and impudent, swagger up to the door. It was the first time he had ventured on a *ruse* so audacious. She determined to open the door herself, and deny her father to this renovated dandy; but her good intentions were frustrated, for Mark, who had been playing 'patience' with himself in the drawing-room, appeared with a pack of cards in his hand, and an inhospitable expression on his lips—

'Why d'ye come here? Go to the devil.'

'After *you*, sir,' Jim replied, with admirable *sang froid*. Kate withdrew. She could not endure the pollution of that presence. Then Jim proceeded, as good-humouredly as though

his reception had been of the most flattering kind—

‘I want a word with you on important private business.’

‘Not here, then, not here. In the open.’

The old man took his coat and hat from a peg in the hall, and marched out as though he were training for a match. Jim could scarcely keep pace with him. The old man never spoke a word, and never faced about until he arrived at that very lane where long ago the man of the world had seen Dick meet Ruth. Westaway entered between the high bare hedgerows, followed by Jim. Then he turned suddenly round, and, facing the young man, exclaimed in a passionate tone—

‘If it’s money you want—don’t open your mouth. D’ye hear, don’t open your mouth.’

‘My dear sir, be relieved. It’s not money. I have plenty of that. If you’re hard up for a fiver I daresay I can accommodate you.’

As he said this he took from his breast pocket a roll of notes which he flourished in

the face of the astonished man. Their crisp rustling fired his cupidity. He stared at them open-mouth'd. It was some moments before he could ask—

‘Then what *do* you want?’

‘Your blessing,’ replied the other with admirable effrontery.

‘My *what!*’ roared Mark.

‘Your blessing, sir. I am about to get married.’

‘Married? To whom?’

‘To Miss Parsons. Commonly called Polly and known to the public as Baby. I trust,’ he added, with a sneer, ‘that you know of no just cause or impediment to prevent this union of two loving hearts.’

The old man’s face grew livid. He grasped the seals at his fob and tugged viciously at them.

‘You’re joking,’ he exclaimed.

‘Never was half so serious before.’

‘Then,’ roared the old man, ‘it shan’t be.

‘By God! you’re my son, and you shan’t marry a strumpet.’

‘I’d have you know that I shall protect her from insult. And if *I am* your son she will soon be your daughter.’

The old man’s rage ceased. He began to cry and maunder—

‘Jim—dear Jim—don’t do it. For my sake don’t do it. I’m a gentleman, Jim. So are you—every inch. Don’t do it, there’s a good fellow.’

Jim laughed aloud—

‘I thought I’d bring you to your senses. The last time I was here my reception was not particularly gracious. You cursed me, you refused me money, you struck at me, you repudiated me. Now, dammit, I repudiate *you*. I shall marry whom I like, and I’m off now to get the consent of old Parsons. He’ll bless me if you won’t.’

Mark’s ungovernable rage now resumed the ascendancy.

‘By the Lord that made me, you shall not

have her. D'ye hear? I swear I'll prevent you.'

He raised his hand to heaven, as if calling his Maker to witness. Meanwhile, Jim shrugged his shoulders, burst into a fit of contemptuous laughter, and hurried off in the direction of the 'Three Feathers.' Mark, trembling with rage and excitement, and entirely possessed by madness, strode back to the farm, muttering blasphemies to himself.

The shadows of evening had gathered round when Jim Gates left the portals of the 'Three Feathers.' Parsons accompanied him to the very door, and wrung his hand at parting with genuine parental warmth. The interview had been quite satisfactory. Many brandies and sodas had been consumed during the momentous conversation. Jim was in excellent spirits. His good humour received a slight check, possibly, as he saw Ruth enter the Priory, accompanied by her mother. And he experienced another feeling of annoyance as he saw Dick Hook knocking

at the door of the Vicarage. His schemes with regard to these young people had miscarried; but in his own elation he soon forgot those slight draw-backs, and when he left the village street for the open road, he sang aloud the refrain of M'Chantry's latest success, informing the robins and the black-birds—now more russet than black—that—

‘Great Britain is cock of the walk.’

He sang and he whistled; looking ahead through the gathering shadows, and never looking round where the shadows gathered thickly too. No; he never turned once to see if haply one of the gathering shadows took shape—took shape, and followed in silence.

He struck into a footpath through an ozier bed that led to the spot where his punt was moored. He levelled a gentlemanly oath or two at a branch of withe as it touched his cheek. But he was, on the whole, cheerful, and made the silent ozier bed echo with melodies of the Palatial,

late Easton's. And the shadows were gathering more thickly behind him. Still he did not stop or peer back into the gloom to ascertain, if possible, whether any one of the shadows had taken a threatening shape.

Where his punt was moored the water had risen right over the ozier bed, so that it was surrounded by the withes, even as the basket of the infant Moses was covered in by the bull-rushes of the Nile. He undid her chain, jumped on board, and grasped the pole.

'I must keep her head well up stream,' he said, as he pushed her from the shore. So once more he turned his back on the thickening shadows of the December night.

There were no sounds heard that were not profoundly melancholy. The wind sighed through the withes, the water moaned as it tumbled over the weir, the current made a sad sopping noise under the treads of the punt, and a belated rook, lost by the home-

ward bound battallions, scudded across the black sky with ominous note.

With her head up stream the punt was pushed out into the river, Jim wondering whether the lock-keeper's children would still be up, and whether he would be in time to catch the train from Wrayton. To these thoughts succeeded memories of Polly—memories that occasioned the gallant punter to reflect greatly on his own magnanimity and condescension.

Jim had not got fifty yards from the shore when a flash, as of lightning, started from the ozier bed, revealing the shadow that had taken form. A tall shadow with gray hair and wild rolling eyes.

Then the dread report of firearms rattled across the swollen river, and caused the frightened rook to redouble the rate of his flight across the unsympathetic sky.

The heavy punt-pole fell from Jim's hands. The punt swerved and turned round in the

stream finally settling down and making for the weir.

With his left hand pressed to his side from which the blood flowed, Jim fell in a heap at the bottom of the craft.

But life is sweet and youth is strong. He was in agony. His brain was on fire. And the blood flowing from his side was leaving him 'flaccid and drained.' He heard the roar of the approaching weir.

He would make one final effort. He rose to his feet. He lifted his hand towards the disappearing ozier bed, and he swore an awful oath that he would be revenged on the Shadow.

Then he tottered and reeled and fell—this time with his head and arms out of the punt.

On towards the weir with increasing impetus sped the punt. The waters gurgled in his ears, and even leaped to his mouth and the blood still streamed, making a ghastly pool in the centre of the vessel.

At last the unconscious craft is brought to

a standstill. She has struck an upright timber of the weir and is held suspended there, the groans of her ghastly burden mingling with the roar of the waters.

The groaning ceased ; and when the sickly moon emerged, its pale uncertain rays fell upon a corpse.

CHAPTER XIII

IT

ANOTHER shadow had taken shape in the ozier bed, watching with considerable interest the proceedings of the first. The second shadow had taken the shape of Hoppy ; and when the first one had departed, and was gathered into the night, Hoppy remained and followed the progress of the punt. He marked the spot where the dead man was held above the roar of the rushing waters, and he hurried off for help, for it would

be unsafe to venture with a single punt pole too near those rapids.

Nor was his search so easy. They are a simple and superstitious folk at Wapshot. The fishermen alone seem to disregard the King of Terrors, and have no absurd scruples about handling the bodies of his victims. After some search Hoppy was so fortunate as to encounter one who followed his own gentle craft, and him he impressed into his service by promising the whole of the fee—half-a-crown—allowed by the county for the discovery of a corpse.

His mate was nick-named Cuckoo, and he interrupted him on his way to the local hostelry.

‘Hallo, Cuckoo,’ said Hoppy.

‘What cheer, matey?’ answered Cuckoo.

Then Hoppy approached and whispered—

‘There’s a stiff on the weir.’

‘Lor! Whose is It?’

Again in a whisper—

‘Jim Gates.’

‘Lor ! let’s go an’ fetch It.’

They turned towards the river.

‘O’ course, ‘Oppy, we takes it to the Wrayton side.’

‘O’ course we does nothink o’ the sort,’ replied Hoppy.

‘But Wapshot side we on’y gits ‘alf a crown for findin’ It. T’other side they gives ye four bob an’ a tanner.’

‘You can have the lot, so it won’t make no difference. Come along.’

In this way did these two fishermen discuss a dear brother departed, *via* the Thames. The mortal coil being shuffled off he became simply It. In the familiar slang of the riverside, James Gates, Esq., had developed into ‘a stiff;’ and to one of the twain at least, he had no interest beyond how much he would make by the recovery of It. An hour ago It had been flushed with health, dreaming of an impossibly brilliant future, and singing gaily the songs of the Music Halls. Now, It was an inanimate lump of clay, worth from half-a-

crown to four bob and a tanner to the finder. Arrived at the river-side, the two men entered Hoppy's punt, and with firmly grasped poles, drifted slowly towards the weir, bent on the recovery of It, and the safe conveyance of It to the 'Three Feathers,' whither, while they are engaged in their dread task, we will also betake ourselves.

The paraffin lamp had for some time been a-light in the bar, and the candles were flickering in their sockets on the oak tables of the tap-room when Mark Westaway, somewhat unsteady in his gait, but with his head held well back, strode through the bar, without taking any notice of its proprietor, and entered the public room, where he called in a loud voice, and with an insulting tone, for a glass of neat brandy.

Rymill, the vet, who was standing at the bar with one or two other men of local repute, gave it as his opinion that the old man was 'on,' meaning, thereby, that he was in an advanced state of intoxication.

The vet, it may be remembered, was also a wag of some little note. So, for the sake of a verbal joke, he amended his statement, adding—

‘At least, I don’t know so much about being *on*. I think myself that he’s *off*—off his head, you know.’

Upon this, Mr Rymill’s friends, the men of local repute, laughed in moderation.

‘Suppose we go in an’ draw the old man,’ suggested Rymill, whose jokes could at times take a practical turn. To this the men of local repute offered no objection; and proceeding to the tap-room, they found Mark talking with great rapidity to himself. He started at their appearance; but regaining his presence of mind, welcomed them in maudlin tones. More brandy was called for, and the gentlemen conversed with great gaiety.

‘I have just heard that your young friend Gates is going to marry the daughter of our worthy host here,’ said Rymill, winking at the other men of repute.

‘And I’m told different,’ answered Mark, swallowing off his brandy.

‘But he has asked the consent of Parsons, and I’m sure behaved most honourable. Has anything happened to break it off?’

‘Happened!’ roared Mark, ‘what dy’e mean by happened? What should happen?’

‘Oh! nothing. I only thought perhaps you might know of another engagement.’

Mark laughed aloud—

‘You’ve hit it in once. Yes, that’s it. He has another engagement. By the lord, that’s good. Rymill, you’re a clever fellow and I’ll have another brandy with you.’

The drink was called for and despatched with the same feverish avidity as its predecessors. Rymill whispered to his friends that the great Mark was very much ‘on’ indeed, and that there was every prospect of subsequent fun. The village wags were not to be disappointed.

The old man soon gave abundant evidence of his being both ‘on’ and ‘off.’ He ex-

plained that he was about to stand for the division. That he had been appointed M.F.H. in the place of Lord Purvis deceased, and that he intended to hunt the county at his own expense. In that case he would certainly appoint his friend Rymill to look after his stud.

‘You’re a real friend,’ said Rymill, with his tongue in his cheek, ‘Ill be hanged if you’re not.’

‘Hanged! Who talks of hanged? It’s a damned ungentlemanly word, Rymill. He’s no gentleman that uses it. And I’ll be blowed if you shall look after my stud now.’

With glazed eye the old man peered round the little assembly, assuming a certain air of dignity. Then he appeared to relax, and said in a tone that was half entreaty—

‘A very ungentlemanly word, indeed. I’m afraid, Rymill, I must fine you drinks round for that word. And I’ll have the same as before.’

With fresh drinks the conversation became more brisk and general. Mark was ludicrously incoherent. And he accepted the laughter that his mad ramblings occasioned as though it were a high compliment to his wit and genius.

Presently, and with considerable difficulty, he rose to his feet, steadied himself by planting his hands firmly on the table, and proposed to sing a song.

In a hoarse uncertain voice he began to trol out, amid the suppressed laughter of his companions, 'The Fine Old English Gentleman.'

The door of the tap-room was open. It commands the passage, and you can see right out into the village street beyond. Presently there mingled with Mark's warbling a distant sound of voices murmuring, and of shuffling feet. The sounds became more distinct. They drew near. At the door of the inn the shuffling of the feet ceased, and the voices were hushed.

From the tap-room, in the light of the flickering lamp, one can see but indistinctly. From the crowd that had murmured and shuffled something emerges. It is a door or shutter, borne by four men. The two front men are Hoppy and a member of the County Constabulary. Those in the rear are Cuckoo and a second constable.

Mark was just in the act of paying his fourth choral compliment to the merits of 'The Fine Old English Gentleman' when he caught sight of the procession in the passage.

He stopped suddenly in the middle of a line. The procession came right on. Rymill, and the other men of repute, now turned also from gazing at the face of the old sportsman, and saw the four men and the shutter with something on the top of it covered with coarse sacks.

Mark stood as still as a statue while the men deposited their burden on the floor.

Then Hoppy, pointing straight at Mark, said to the constable—

‘That’s him. I seen him do it.’

Then at last Mark found voice. It was a final effort and sounded more like the yell of a wounded animal—

‘You lie,’ he shouted, levelling his glass in the direction of Hoppy’s head. The tumbler missed its aim and shivered on the wall behind in a hundred pieces. Mark staggered and fell forward with his face on the table.

Rymill rushed to his assistance, thinking that the unfortunate gentleman had a fit. But when he attempted to raise him he discovered that he was quite dead.

CHAPTER XIV

THE HOUSE OF MOURNING

RELENTLESS as fate, Hoppy had pointed out the murderer to the Sergeant of Police. But before the men could deposit their cold and dripping burden on the floor, another sergeant had interposed.

‘This fell sergeant, Death,
Is strict in his arrest.’

And now victim and avenger lay stiff and stark awaiting the result of the Coroner's Quest.

Even a tap-room acquires an awful solemnity when it is turned into a chamber of death. And since the Coroner's Officer had examined the bodies no one had entered the room. In the bar people spoke in whispers. And the village children, as they passed the door of the 'Three Feathers,' hurried home with scared faces and fingers pressed upon their lips.

A silence had fallen on the little village of Wapshot. Three inquests on drowned bodies had been held in that old room. But they had been those of people not connected with the community. There were men alive who could remember the inquiry touching the murder of Mrs Wicks in 1825. That, indeed, was a momentous occurrence. But this eclipsed them all. It seemed only yesterday that Mark was out and about, somewhat strange and eccentric in his manner, to be sure, but still quite the gentleman, with a nod for everybody, and a kind

word for 'the kids,' as he called the infants of the hamlet.

Now he was lying dead within a stone's throw of the last house in Wapshot. Dead—with another man's blood on his soul. In its most ambitious mood Wapshot could never have anticipated being made the scene of a tragedy like this. The cowed villagers did not merely sup on horrors. They breakfasted, dined, *and* supped on them.

A delicious thrill of horror went through the little post-mistress when she remembered how often she had grasped the murderer's hand. And the men of substance and repute conceived that a considerable wrong had been done them, inasmuch as no one had ever pointed out to them the sort of man Mark really was. Had they known, they certainly would never have associated with him. Hoppy alone exhibited no undue excitement. He limped about grim, silent, inscrutable, with the secret locked in his breast, to be divulged only on oath before the Coroner of the district.

To the credit of the little community, be it recorded, considerable sympathy was now expressed for Mark's daughters. It was felt that some injustice had been done to them. Little kindnesses, not appreciated at the time, perhaps, were now remembered. Their characters had been misunderstood, or, rather, they had been the victims of 'irresponsible chatter.' Loquacious little men like Rymill can do an infinity of evil when they make up their minds to it. Mark was a man who touched the public imagination. He was the villagers' ideal of an open-hearted, free-handed English gentleman. That the vagaries of so estimable man should be interfered with, was not for a moment to be tolerated.

Then came those apt comparisons of Rymill. King Lear, it will be recollected, was brought into requisition, and Mark's children, Kate and Rose, were cast respectively for the parts of Goneril and Regan. But suddenly, the image that had been set up

was dashed from its pedestal. The most popular man in Wapshot finished as an assassin and died in his cups.

While this reversal of an unfair verdict was taking place in the minds of those who had regarded Mark as a great and lofty type of manhood, what shall be said of those who always loved and sheltered the whilom owner of Vicarage Farm? Modest in their pretensions, unsparing in the discharge of their duties, and patient under untold persecutions, they had attracted the esteem of those whom they regarded as their social superiors to an extent, which, but for this awful event, they could not have hoped or dreamed.

At first the blow stunned them. It was too terrible for tears. They sat numbed and incapable of action. But the tears were soon to come; for Hoppy, unbeliever and priest-hater as he was, went himself to the Vicarage to obtain the services of his reverence, who lost no time in repairing to the farm with sympathy and consolation.

The women had kindly feelings for the dead old man, who had plagued and persecuted and robbed them. They made excuses for him. The gun might have gone off by accident. In any case he was quite irresponsible—he had been ‘queer’ in his head for months. In that of course lay the sting of this death. They would be branded as the daughters of a murderer. The finger of public scorn would be lifted against them. They would be driven from their home.

When their mother died they had wept and wept for her, regarding themselves as inconsolable. But they had followed her to the churchyard. They had thrown wreaths upon the coffin. They saw with a pride that pierced through their tears the numbers that had followed her to her last home. When a tombstone was erected they repaired to God’s acre to read the inscription — a somewhat inflated epitaph drawn up by Mark himself, who had nothing now but exaggerated eulogium and irrepres-

sible regret for a woman whom all through her life he had treated with systematic cruelty.

But the other death was so different. What mourners would follow their father to his grave? Indeed would he be allowed sepulture at all in consecrated ground? They had read something somewhere about the disposal of the murderer's corpse in quicklime.

These distracting thoughts were busy with the two girls who, when O'L ympus entered were sitting together in their little drawing room pale-faced and wide-eyed. The good man allayed their fears, assured them of universal sympathy, and spoke comfortable words to them. Then indeed other considerations faded away. Sorrow for their poor sinning sire was uppermost. Rose leant her head against her sister's bosom, and they both wept bitterly — wept bitterly for the un-honoured dead.

Nor were the kind assurances of the Vicar

to be unendorsed. On the morrow, Ruth, accompanied by her mother, hastened to the home of the afflicted girls. But though they had started on their errand of pity soon after breakfast they found another comforter on the spot. Miss Dunlop was as eager and energetic in the pursuit of charity as in the pursuit of pleasure. She had established herself mistress of the ceremonies; had insisted on the bereaved ones, who since last night had tasted no food, partaking of mild refreshments in the shape of tea and toast. And now on the arrival of fresh guests she relieved the sisters of all responsibility, acting as hostess without any hesitation. She bade Ruth and her mother welcome, and with infinite tact calmed the scene of lamentation, which would most assuredly have raged after the meeting of the Westaways and their dearest friend.

Besides pouring oil and wine into the wounded hearts of her acquaintances, Carrie's brain was busy with other designs. No

place was unsuitable for her schemes; and even the house of mourning she would make the platform for those deeply laid plots, whereby she hoped to encompass the happiness of her children, as she called Dick and Ruth.

Half-an-hour after the arrival of Mrs Gilliat and her daughter there was a knock at the door; and as Carrie heard it opened she left the drawing-room, re-appearing almost immediately in company with Lady Hook and her son. There was no hesitation about Miss Dunlop's proceedings. Without waiting for any intimation of acquiescence she introduced the ladies from the Priory to the Mistress of Riverdale.

Of the three it must be conceded that Mrs Gilliat betrayed the least confusion. Lady Hook's sudden recollection of what her worthy husband would say dashed her spirits, and somewhat interfered with the dignified manner usual to her. Nor was her confusion lessened by the fact that Ruth

and Dick had shaken hands with a cordiality which she considered very bad form indeed.

She attempted to cover her perturbation by raising a cloud of general reflections on the awfulness of sudden death, which was intended to have a secondary effect in alleviating the sorrow of the Misses Westaway.

‘Although I never quite approved of Mr Westaway, and although Sir Penton had really conceived a great aversion to him, it is a very terrible and sudden affliction ; and as to his shooting the other person, I don’t believe he did it all, and I hope the Coroner’s people will declare that the creature was found drowned.’

So all, after their different methods, endeavoured to make the orphans feel that no shadow of a crime rested on them ; and if Lady Hook’s address was rambling, her intention was evident, and Kate and her sister thanked and blessed her for it.

On gentle and simple alike sympathy has its influence. And the awful passing by of

the Angel of Death—so near that one almost felt the motion of his wings—drew together in a common sentiment of pity those who under the circumstances of every-day life had stood aloof.

How proud and grateful through their grief, were the sisters for this unexpected evidence of the regard in which they were held by what was best and most respected in their native village. Never before had that little drawing-room of theirs held so goodly a company. There stood the little table with its ebony inkstand, and photographic albums, its gilt edged poets, and other works of literature and art. It was the same table upon which, in other days, Mark would, when 'in a temper,' plant his boots and varnish them.

Mark's likeness — in silhouette — hung by the mantel-piece facing a similar portrait of his patient and ill-used wife. The blaze of flowers had gone from the window, and the path between the rose trees looked

drenched and dreary. But a fire of logs burned cheerfully in the grate, and the canary warbled as unconcernedly as though Black Care had been banished from the world.

In low hushed tones the conversation was carried on — if, indeed, to the common-places current, on such occasions, that term may be applied. It was as though the dead body were in the next room. When the interchange of common-place flagged, it was Miss Dunlop who invariably came to the rescue. She had succeeded in putting Lady Hook at her ease, and that estimable dame was engaging in conversation with Mrs Gilliat. Ruth alone was ill at ease. Her eyes sought the ground. She did not dare encounter those of Dick's mother.

In attributing to the Angel of Death the bringing together of these social elements, we may have been placing too much to the credit of that Dread Spirit. It would perhaps have been nearer the mark to have

said that advantage of his presence and influence had been taken by a certain angel of life; and that Carrie Dunlop had for an hour or two been indefatigable in her efforts to get those good people together. She was the stage-manager. And if the scene failed it was from no lack of effort on her part, but because of the seriousness of some of the performers and an incapacity for realising the situation on the part of others.

Her quick eye now caught sight of a tall slight figure, slightly stooped, proceeding along the wide pathway towards the house. She glided from the room, and when she returned she was accompanied by Mr Gilliat. It must be admitted that for a moment this entry caused most of those present to feel uncomfortable and ill at ease. Ruth breathed quickly and became very pale. A blush mantled on the ingenuous cheek of Dick. Lady Hook trembled for the consequences, and even the sisters dreaded rebuke from this avowed opponent of the Vanities.

He himself was moved by no such motives. His sad face had lost that stern expression which had been its characteristic. There was nothing but sympathy there as he spoke to the Westaways. He bowed gravely as he was introduced to Lady Hook and to her son. No indication of resentment or anger was discernible in his face. Ruth breathed freely once more. And Dick looked in the direction of his love with signals of encouragement flashing from his eyes.

Mr Gilliat was a man who always felt it to be his mission to improve the occasion, when events of solemn import occurred. These occurrences he regarded as messages from Heaven. Events whereby the supremacy of providence was proved and vindicated. So the current of commonplaces was stayed for a time as the evangelist dwelt on the uncertainty of life and the unsuspected imminence of Eternity.

With the memory of the dead man he dealt gently—deprecating human judgment

and alleging its proverbial fallibility. The girls wept silently listening to his musical voice, his sympathetic tone, his aptly chosen words.

When he had done improving the occasion, he invited those present to kneel with him while he prayed that divine support might be accorded to those who were fatherless and motherless. This invitation greatly disconcerted Lady Hook, who considered that functions of this kind should be conducted in churches, or at least in a private chapel such as that in the country house of her father Lord Egham-Hythe. Moreover, she felt absolutely horrified at the thought of her worthy husband hearing of such a proceeding on her part.

Nevertheless, she knelt. And just as the ribald boys at Wrayton Fair were subdued by Gilliat's earnestness and eloquence, so was her heart touched by his evident sincerity, by the fervour of his appeal, and not least of all, perhaps, by the beauty of his diction.

The door of the room was slightly open, and two men stood there in silent surprise and expectation. If I said that the heart of Sir Penton Hook was affected by the matter of the evangelist's supplication, I would do that magnate a gross injustice. But he was not insensible to its manner, and he recognised that grace of style which unconsciously to the suppliant adorned the natural beauty of his language.

‘Evidently a most remarkable man,’ he whispered to the Rev. Mr O’Lympus, to whose eyes the tears had sprung. On the whole, while he listened he thought how much more worthily the pulpit of Wapshot Church might be filled by such a man.

Both the new comers had been admitted silently by Miss Dunlop—nor could the moment of their arrival have been better timed had she contrived it herself. When the ‘Amen’ of Mr Gilliat floated through the room like the last note in a symphony, and those present had risen from their

knees, Sir Penton entered, followed by the Vicar.

It was another awkward moment. Sir Penton bowed gravely to the assembly in his cold formal way. He then approached the sisters, and giving each a hand, uttered condolences that were about as sympathetic and comforting as icicles.

Then he approached Mr Gilliat; he braced himself for a mighty effort. He wished to be affable; he only succeeded in being condescending. He attempted geniality; he achieved pomposity. He extended his hand, not unconscious of the fact that he was offering that thin and nervous part of him to Lord Hampton's friend.

'Sir,' he said, 'on the occasion of our last meeting, there was, I fear, some slight misunderstanding.'

'I am happy to think,' replied Gilliat, taking the extended hand, 'that I misunderstood you.'

'I trust, at all events, that the incid-

ent has been forgotten,' went on the baronet.

'It has been forgiven,' replied the other. 'My memory is not under my control or it would have been forgotten long ago.'

Sir Penton bowed—

'I shall esteem it a favour to be presented to Mrs Gilliat.'

The evangelist introduced his wife and daughter. Sir Penton extended his hand to each in turn, and addressing himself to Mrs Gilliat in particular, said,

'I have long wished for the introduction which chance has thrown in my way. I trust that we shall become better acquainted. I regret that at this moment public business calls me away.'

He bowed with fine frigidity to the occupants of the room. Carrie alone insisted on shaking hands with him—a ceremony which she performed with so much warmth that one might have imagined that he had done her some great personal service. Commend-

ing Lady Hook to the care of her son, he left the house, a gentle sigh of relief accompanying his exit.

The Rev. Laurence Sterne once preached from the text—‘It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting,’ and with characteristic audacity he commenced his discourse by declaring bluntly ‘That I deny!’

As Lady Hook walked from the farm side by side with Mrs Gilliat, they were followed by Ruth and Dick also walking side by side, and the rear of the procession was brought up by Mr Gilliat and Carrie: O’Lympus having remained behind with the Westaways.

Had the strange text from Ecclesiastes been submitted to the group accompanied by the emphatic contradiction of the author of ‘Tristram Shandy,’ I am inclined to think that there were at least two out of the six who would have taken the part of the

ancient philosopher against the opinion of the Protestant divine.

Dick and Ruth were together again without parental disapproval. They had discovered that it was a very good thing indeed to go to the house of mourning.

CHAPTER XV

AND ALL TOLD

THE pigeons swoop round the square brick tower at Riverdale or settle on the roof of their cot cooing in the mild air of a May morning. Although five years have passed away little seems altered there. The well trimmed lawn slopes gently down to the quiet waters where the dark green leaves of the lilies lie cool and motionless.

In the meadow the Alderneys ruminate and from the plantation and the garden bushes come the voices of the birds thrilling with

glad messages of the Spring. The unaccustomed eye notes no change. All things here in house or lawn or river are just as they were when last we gazed on them five years ago.

All things?

No. Look at the launch now moored beside the ait. She has been newly painted. If I remember aright, she used to be called the 'Ethel,' after nobody in particular. That name has been painted out and another has been substituted. She is now known on the upper reaches as the 'Ruth.'

And what is yonder phenomenon—over there beneath the shadow of the bank of rhododendron? A curious quadruped truly, a quadruped with a limp in one of its hind legs. A quadruped dressed in a velveteen jacket. A four legged animal that laughs like a man. This strange beast of burden has reins of bright red attached to his body, and these are firmly grasped by a young gentleman of little more than three, who

tugs at them as his steed staggers forward. When the animal displays signs of halting or gibbing, the young driver belabours him with his whip shouting the while—

‘Gee up, Hoppy!’

And when after a further effort the patient brute falls, and the unrelenting Jehu stumbles over him, both horse and driver laugh in a way that is most refreshing to hear, the horse observing,

‘We both on us come to grief that time, Master Richard.’

And the child goes up to the horse’s head and stroking his short gray hair, says in a gentle cooing voice—

‘Nevva mind, Hoppy. Dood old Hoppy.’

Then he holds his little face up for a kiss, which the quadruped, now standing on two legs like a human being, stoops down to accord.

At this juncture a nursemaid, affecting great alarm and solicitude, darts from the house, and approaching the pair, says to the child—

‘Come with me, Master Dick; it’s time to go in.’

‘G’long,’ says Hoppy to this menial in muslin.

‘I shall *not* go along,’ replies the lady, tartly; ‘and Master Dick must come with me.’

‘Me not go,’ answers the child, with a calm determination worthy of his years.

A voice,

‘Ever soft,
Gentle and low,’

comes from a window that opens from the house on to the lawn. A sweet, familiar voice it is, more confident in its tones, perhaps, than when we heard it last, and the voice says—

‘You may let him stay a little longer, nurse.’

‘Very well, ma’am,’ answers the nurse, as the horse and his driver career down the lawn, the one laughing, and the other shouting in token of victory.

But the nurse being a woman, will not so easily submit. She stoops to the ground and picks something up. It is something soiled, and it smells consumedly of tobacco. She calls out in sight and in hearing of the window—

‘Hi, Mr Molt! you’ve dropped something.’

Hoppy, once more assuming the attitude of a man, approaches the girl with no very amiable expression. Holding the something soiled between two fingers, and averting her head, as though its odour were fatal, she hands it to the devoted man.

‘Taint mine,’ he says.

As however, at the same time, he takes the Something with a vicious snatch from the handmaiden, and thrusts it deep down into the pocket of his velveteen coat, it may be inferred that he had some proprietary interest in it. This view is naturally strengthened when it is discovered that the soiled and strongly smelling Something is the Sunday organ of Republicanism, in the columns of

which Hoppy continues to take sweet counsel with Brutus and the Serf.

Ruth, looking from the window, notes the incident, and quite understands the confusion of Hoppy; for of course it is Ruth, and Riverdale is Ruth's, and above all, that little toddler of three years is Ruth's; and there is Ruth's husband sitting at his table with knitted brows pouring over some proofs for the printers. Since Dick entered into possession of his excellent father's riverside house—the worthy baronet, in view of important duties in another place, had settled permanently in his town residence—he had entered also upon some of the magnate's duties. He had been made a Justice of the Peace, and was at present engaged in the preparation of a manual which he thought might be of service to justices in general. The work was less pleasant and less congenial, perhaps, than that of playwriting. But he was actuated by a strong sense of duty, and a belief that to many worthy magistrates

even Stone's celebrated hand-book was an unintelligible work.

Ruth is afraid that he will ruin his health and spoil his eyes—he has beautiful eyes—by such application, and, leaving the window, bends over him. She places her hand on the proofs which he is correcting, and invites him, nothing loath, to the open casement to inspect the cavalry performances of their son and heir.

And, indeed, after bending over those wretched sheets there is something greatly refreshing in the masses of budding green, in the scents from the garden, in the broad silver surface of the river. Of course, like most fathers, Hook affects an utterly insincere indifference to the equine evolutions of his son.

‘What a pity Molt cannot come and live here altogether,’ says the master of the house. ‘He’s such a handy fellow about the place; and that young rascal of ours has taken such a fancy to him.’

‘He will never do that,’ replies Ruth, shaking her head. ‘He will live in the caravan, and he will die there.’

She gave a little shudder as she spoke, and linked her arm with that of her husband.

‘An incorrigible heathen—eh, Ruth?’

‘The world, I suppose, would think him one. Yet I am not afraid to leave our child in his company. And I believe, were he called upon to do it, he would lay down his life at a moment’s notice for him or for us.’

‘In that case, my darling, you may be perfectly certain that he is a heathen,’ answered Dick.

It is alleged by those who are supposed to understand the workings of Society, and to carry large quantities of contemporary history about in their memories, that the Countess of Hampton has carried into political life that love of conspiracy which distinguished her in private circles. She

has abandoned — so they say — the stage management of family affairs, and occasionally undertakes the stage management of matters of European interest.

Be that as it may, it is notorious that certain international asperities have been softened in her saloons, and great questions of State have found their solution there. Years ago, and when Dick first heard of her engagement to Lord Hampton, he said, dubiously, 'I wonder will she be as jolly when she's a Countess?'

Well, no doubt the world has its duties to one who has taken a high position in it. And Lady Hampton was now the wife of a Cabinet minister. But when, on rare occasions, she journeyed down to Wapshot, accompanied by her two little daughters and their nurses, she appeared to Ruth and her husband, the Carrie of the old days. Even her Uncle Fitz — in whose nimbus of golden red some streaks of gray were beginning to appear — was obliged to

admit that the world had not spoiled her.

Notwithstanding their political differences Sir Penton and Lady Hook were on excellent terms with the host and hostess of Hampton House. A session in the House of Commons had done something—not much, but something—to tone down Sir Penton's more irritating characteristics. He discovered very shortly after his entrance into Parliament, that the House of Commons is not a County Bench. A man soon finds his level in that assembly. And Sir Penton found his.

At the same time his temperament would not permit him to be a silent member. And he has pestered more than one Home Secretary on subjects of local and imperial interest. I have before me as I write a cutting from the *Jupiter Tonans*, which shows that he has his uses in the counsels of the combined wisdom; it also reminds me that another friend of ours who succeeded

in snatching a majority in the Borough of Ballymarean, has no belief whatever in the saying 'silence is golden,' as applied to Parliamentary procedure. Here follows the cutting :—

POLLUTION OF THE THAMES.

Sir PENTON HOOK asked the Home Secretary whether in view of the approach of a terrible epidemic and the desirability of appeasing the public mind as to the increasing pollution of the Thames below Teddington Lock, he would state whether it was the intention of Her Majesty's Government to take immediate steps in the matter.

Sir SAMUEL BLAND—No, sir.

Mr D'ARCY MAGEE asked the Rt. Hon. Gentleman, the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether his attention had been called to the alarming state of the Liffey, a beautiful and historic stream flowing through the capital city of Ireland. (Laughter.) He complained that, owing to the neglect of successive governments, this once pellucid river had degenerated to a pestilent ditch, a disgrace to civilization, and a permanent danger to the lives of his unfortunate fellow countrymen. He ventured to hope that in replying to his question the Home Secretary would endeavour to be less curt and discourteous than—(cries of 'Oh' and laughter).

The SPEAKER—The honourable member is not en-

titled to make such comments on the answers of ministers. (Cheers.)

Sir SAMUEL BLAND—Perhaps the honourable and learned member will give notice of his question.

Mr D'ARCY MAGEE was understood to say that under the circumstances, he considered it a mere waste of time to pursue the matter further.

Sir SAMUEL BLAND—The honourable and learned member is, of course, the best judge of his own responsibilities. (A laugh.)

The House then went into committee on the East India Revenue accounts.

A woman with a pale worn face, sunken cheeks, and big bright eyes, walks slowly down between the regular rows of beds in the wards of a London hospital. She is plainly dressed in black, with a white apron and a white cap. She is one of the nurses who attend to the needs and attempt to assuage the pains of sisters who lie there suffering.

More than a year ago she was taken to this hospital as a patient. Some good visiting Samaritan had found her dying in a

garret—dying alone and in the dark. When she was conveyed to this retreat she was recognised by one of its founders as Baby Parsons—a burlesque actress, who for a couple of seasons had gained some notoriety at the Oddity Theatre. In her present position she may not be absolutely happy, for she has drained the cup of life to the dregs. But she is content, and the consciousness that she is trusted by those who have placed her in this situation affords her a satisfaction which is the nearest approach to happiness that she will ever know.

The hospital itself is one of those noble testimonies to private philanthropy with which our Modern Babylon is happily well supplied. It was built by Mr and Mrs Gilliat who devoted their joint fortunes to its maintenance. But so admirably was the institution conducted, so great became its fame, and eventually so inadequate its resources to the demands of those suffering from disease and want that the public stepped

in, and its basis of operations was greatly enlarged. Among those who are among the most considerable subscribers to the funds of the 'Hospital for Outcasts,' are Lord Hampton and the Countess of Hampton, Lord Ballymacarret, Sir Penton Hook and Lady Hook, with other persons of distinction who, as they have nothing to do with this narrative, may be omitted here.

But though the public have come in with subscriptions, the personal attention of the re-united husband and wife to which the institution owes its success is continued and is unremitting. They have taken up their abode in the metropolis, where in many poor minds their name is synonymous with charity. And the Priory at Wapshot is once more without a tenant.

The Westaways have not married. As, indeed, how should they? The only individuals of the male sex brought within

their circle at Wapshot are Rymill, the vet, and the other men of repute in the village. The suit of the veterinary surgeon had, as we know, been rejected by Miss Rose Westaway; and neither he nor any of the other Wapshot celebrities was worthy to aspire to the hand of Kate or Rose.

The devotion of these women had not been of that picturesque kind with which the world falls in love. Their suffering was not of the sensational sort out of which romance is weaved. But they are genuine heroines, I tell you, and their heroism is all the greater, because a world that likes a little show for its money accords it neither praise nor reward.

At the bar of Mr Parsons—that estimable man still keeps the ‘Three Feathers,’ where he occasionally expresses regret at the social downfall of his daughter, Polly—at the bar of the ‘Feathers,’ I say, the Misses Westaway are regarded as commonplace young people with uneventful lives; and the opinion of

the world in general might be safely measured by that of the local inn.

But at Riverdale the sisters are always honoured guests. Nurse declares that they are spoiling Master Richard—who, under the tutelage of Hoppy, has already committed numerous acts of mutiny.

Ruth is not inclined to agree with the sage deliverances of nurse. When she gazes across the water flags and the loose-strife and the forget-me-not on to the silent waters of the stream; or when her eye wanders to the hedge-rows that top the lane where she confessed her first and only love; or when her skiff is sculled past that lonely backwater where she took her one sad leave of him; when these scenes stir associations within her, she prays that in educating her boy she may know always how to assist nature, how to direct her promptings—how not to divert or thwart or stifle her silent ministering.

THE END

} x



